

Life-Coherent Peace

An Autopoietic, Life-Value, Anti-Violence Framework for Human and Planetary Flourishing

Author: Dr. Bichara Sahely

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Abstract

This paper develops the concept of **Life-Coherent Peace** as an integrative framework for human and planetary flourishing. It brings together John McMurtry’s life-value onto-axiology, Humberto Maturana’s biology of autopoiesis and love, and Johan Galtung’s peace research on direct, structural, and cultural violence. The central argument is that peace should not be understood merely as the absence of war, direct injury, or disorder, but as the organized social, ecological, economic, cultural, and relational enablement of life-capacities. McMurtry provides the value criterion: the good is that which enables a more coherently

inclusive range of thought, felt being, and action, while disvalue reduces, disables, or destroys these capacities. Maturana provides the biological and epistemological grounding: living beings are autonomous, structurally coupled unities who bring forth worlds in domains of languaging and emotioning, and human coexistence becomes possible in the relational domain of love understood as acceptance of the other as legitimate in coexistence. Galtung provides the diagnostic grammar: violence is not only direct harm but also the structural and cultural organization of avoidable life-disablement. Read together, these thinkers disclose peace as **life-coherent coexistence**: the compossible flourishing of persons, communities, species, and planetary life-support systems. The paper strengthens this synthesis by addressing two critical challenges: first, the risk of reducing love to bureaucracy or imposing life-value through domination; second, the problem of competing life-needs when different life-enabling claims come into conflict. It therefore proposes a **Life-Coherence Test** and a **Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol** as disciplined, dialogical methods for evaluating policies, institutions, technologies, and cultural arrangements. The paper concludes that Life-Coherent Peace is not a utopian end-state or technocratic command system, but a secular covenant for life on Earth: a shared commitment to organize coexistence so that living beings can think, feel, act, relate, and flourish without destroying the life-ground of others.

Keywords: life-value onto-axiology, life-ground ethics, autopoiesis, structural coupling, languaging, love, structural violence, cultural violence, positive peace, civil commons, life capital, life-coherence, planetary flourishing

Executive Summary

Peace is often defined negatively: no war, no open conflict, no visible disorder. This definition is dangerously incomplete. A society may be free of bombs while tolerating hunger, ecological destruction, preventable disease, loneliness, humiliation, dispossession, and despair. In such a society, the guns may be silent, but life-capacities are still being disabled.

This paper proposes **Life-Coherent Peace** as a more adequate framework. Peace becomes life-coherent when social, ecological, economic, cultural, and political arrangements conserve and expand the capacities of living beings to think, feel, act, relate, and flourish without destroying the life-ground of others.

The framework integrates three major thinkers. John McMurtry provides the value criterion: value is whatever enables a more coherently inclusive range of thought, felt being, and action; disvalue is whatever reduces, disables, or destroys these capacities. Humberto Maturana provides the biological and relational grounding: living beings are autopoietic unities structurally coupled to their medium, and human social life depends upon languaging, emotioning, and love understood as acceptance of the other as legitimate in coexistence. Johan Galtung provides the diagnostic grammar: violence appears directly, structurally, and culturally wherever avoidable life-disablement is organized or legitimated.

The synthesis leads to a practical claim: peace cannot be measured only by the absence of direct violence. It must be assessed by whether institutions, economies, languages, technologies, ecologies, and cultures enable or disable life-capacity.

The paper therefore proposes two methodological tools. The **Life-Coherence Test** asks whether a policy or institution expands or contracts life-capacities, secures or deprives the means of life, strengthens or weakens civil commons, reduces or reproduces violence, protects or degrades ecological life-support, arises from mutual legitimacy or domination, and subordinates money-sequences to life-sequences. The **Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol** addresses the harder problem of competing life-needs, where different life-enabling claims come into conflict.

The paper concludes that Life-Coherent Peace is neither technocracy nor moral absolutism. It is a disciplined, dialogical, life-grounded practice of social learning under constraint.

1. Introduction: From Non-War to Life-Coherence

The crises of the present age are usually named separately: climate breakdown, war, inequality, public health failure, loneliness, forced migration, ecological destruction, political polarization, institutional distrust, and widening despair. Each name identifies a real domain of injury. Yet the separation of these crises can obscure their deeper common structure. Modern societies possess extraordinary technical power, administrative capacity, military reach, scientific sophistication, and productive force, yet often lack a coherent life-grounded criterion for distinguishing what enables life from what disables it.

This failure appears in familiar contradictions. An economy may grow while ecosystems collapse. A state may maintain order while reproducing deprivation. A society may avoid open war while tolerating hunger, preventable disease, loneliness, humiliation, ecological contamination, debt bondage, educational exclusion, and the quiet destruction of life-capacities. A technology may be celebrated as innovation while degrading attention, labour, truth, ecology, and social trust. A health system may expand its procedures and expenditures while the conditions that generate disease remain untransformed. These contradictions suggest that peace has been too narrowly understood.

Peace is often defined as the absence of war, the management of conflict, or the restoration of order. Johan Galtung famously challenged this narrow view by distinguishing **negative peace**, understood as the absence of direct violence, from **positive peace**, which requires the transformation of structural conditions that prevent human flourishing (Galtung, 1969, 1996). He later introduced the concept of **cultural violence** to describe symbolic, ideological, and meaning-making systems that legitimate direct and structural violence (Galtung, 1990). Galtung thereby made visible what conventional definitions of peace conceal: a society can be free from bombing and still be organized through life-disabling structures.

This paper proposes the concept of **Life-Coherent Peace**. Life-Coherent Peace names the social, ecological, economic, cultural, and relational organization of conditions that conserve and expand the life-capacities of persons, communities, species, and planetary systems. It is not peace as mere non-war. It is peace as organized life-enablement.

The framework integrates three bodies of thought, but it does not simply place them side by side. Their concepts illuminate one another.

John McMurtry provides the axiological ground. His life-value onto-axiology defines value in terms of the enabling of life-capacity across thought, felt being, and action. His life-ground ethics then translates this criterion into universal life necessities, civil commons, life capital, and a life-serving economy (McMurtry, 2011, 2013). His core life-code formula may be expressed as:

Life → Means of Life → More or Better Life

Humberto Maturana provides the biological and epistemological ground. With Francisco Varela, he developed the concept of **autopoiesis** to describe living systems as autonomous, self-producing unities (Maturana & Varela, 1980). His later work on structural coupling, languaging, emotioning, and love shows that human worlds are not merely represented but brought forth in relational domains of coexistence (Maturana & Varela, 1992; Maturana Romesín & Verden-Zöller, 2008).

Johan Galtung provides the diagnostic and transformational ground. His distinction between direct, structural, and cultural violence enables life-disablement to be recognized not only in overt harm, but in institutions, built environments, ideologies, and narratives that make injury appear normal, deserved, efficient, necessary, or invisible (Galtung, 1969, 1990, 1996).

The central claim of this paper is therefore:

Peace is life-coherent when living beings are enabled to conserve and expand their capacities for thought, felt being, and action through relational, institutional, ecological, and cultural conditions that do not disable the life-ground of others.

This paper is best understood as a **theoretical framework paper** rather than an empirical validation study. Its purpose is not to prove, through quantitative measurement, that Life-Coherent Peace has already been operationalized in a complete policy system. Rather, it proposes a disciplined integrative framework through which value, living organization, violence, civil commons, and governance can be re-described and evaluated. Its contribution is conceptual, diagnostic, and methodological: conceptual because it integrates McMurtry, Maturana, and Galtung into a shared grammar of life-coherence; diagnostic because it identifies forms of life-disablement that conventional measures of peace, growth, and order often conceal; and methodological because it offers the Life-Coherence Test and Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol as tools for evaluating institutions, policies, technologies, and cultural norms. Empirical application, indicator development, comparative case analysis, and policy evaluation are necessary next steps, but they lie beyond the scope of this initial synthesis.

FIGURE 1. THE TRIADIC ARCHITECTURE OF LIFE-COHERENT PEACE
*Integrating Life-Value, Living Systems, and Peace Research
 for Human and Planetary Flourishing*



Figure 1. The Triadic Architecture of Life-Coherent Peace

2. The Life-Value Criterion and the Biology of Value

The framework begins with McMurtry’s question: **What is good? What is bad?** His answer does not begin from subjective preference, market price, utility, social convention, divine command, or abstract duty. It begins from life itself. The Primary Axiom of Value states that something is valuable if and only if, and to the extent that, it enables a more coherently inclusive range of thought, felt side of being, and action. Conversely, something is disvaluable if and only if, and to the extent that, it reduces, disables, or destroys any range of thought, felt side of being, or action (McMurtry, 2011).

This criterion is powerful because it grounds value in the capacities of living beings. Thought includes image, concept, reflection, memory, imagination, understanding, discernment, and the capacity to learn. Felt being includes sensation, desire, emotion, mood, suffering, joy, fear, trust, love, grief, and care. Action includes movement, agency, participation, work, creation, communication, and the ability to enact one’s possibilities in the world.

Value, in this sense, is not a mysterious property added to life from the outside. Value is what enables life to become more capacious, coherent, inclusive, and flourishing. Disvalue is what

contracts life, silences thought, deadens feeling, disables agency, degrades relational possibility, or destroys the conditions of living.

Maturana deepens this criterion by clarifying what kind of beings are at stake. Living beings are not machines assembled from outside. They are autopoietic unities: self-producing networks that continuously regenerate the components and boundaries through which they exist as living systems (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Life is not simply present. It is continuously produced, conserved, repaired, and enacted. A living being cannot be understood merely as a consumer, worker, voter, patient, resource, or unit of utility. It is a self-producing unity whose continued existence depends on maintaining viable organization in relation to a medium.

This is why McMurtry's "means of life" are not merely external goods. Air, water, food, shelter, care, language, education, healthcare, meaningful work, community, and ecological stability are conditions of structural coupling. They are the relational medium through which living beings conserve themselves and open possibilities for thought, felt being, and action.

A life-value criterion therefore becomes biologically concrete. To deprive people of clean water, nourishing food, safe housing, social belonging, meaningful education, health protection, truthful information, and ecological stability is not simply to reduce welfare. It is to damage the conditions of structural coupling through which autopoietic life remains viable.

This also clarifies the distinction between the **life-sequence** and the **money-sequence**. In the life-sequence, life is the ground and end; means of life are organized to serve life; and the outcome is more or better life:

Life → Means of Life → More or Better Life

In the money-sequence, money is the beginning and end, while life becomes an instrument:

Money → Life as Means → More Money

Human labour, ecosystems, public knowledge, illness, attention, bodies, land, debt, care, and even suffering can become means for private money multiplication (McMurtry, 2013). The problem is not that money exists, nor that exchange is always destructive. The problem arises when money becomes the ruling sequence of value and life is subordinated to its accumulation. A system governed by money-sequencing lacks an internal criterion for distinguishing life-enabling from life-disabling activity. It can count transactions while remaining blind to whether living beings and ecosystems are flourishing or breaking down.

This is the condition McMurtry calls **life-blindness**. A commodity that nourishes life and a commodity that addicts, pollutes, or degrades life may both appear as "goods" if they sell. Gross domestic product may rise through sickness, disaster recovery, weapons production, ecological extraction, planned obsolescence, and debt expansion. Without a life-value criterion, growth can coincide with degeneration.

Life-value onto-axiology therefore restores the missing measure. A society is not good because it maximizes aggregate commodities, private profits, national power, consumer choice, or technical output. It is good to the extent that it secures and develops the conditions through which life-capacities flourish.

3. Structural Coupling and Structural Violence

Galtung's theory of violence can now be read through Maturana's biology and McMurtry's value criterion. Violence is not only the direct infliction of injury. It is any avoidable pattern that reduces, disables, or destroys life-capacity.

Direct violence injures life immediately. It kills, maims, assaults, imprisons, tortures, threatens, terrorizes, or physically coerces. It directly reduces the range of thought, felt being, and action.

Structural violence disables life through social arrangements. Poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, colonial extraction, unsafe housing, medical exclusion, educational deprivation, debt bondage, ecological contamination, and labour exploitation may injure without a visible attacker. The violence is built into the structure (Galtung, 1969).

Cultural violence legitimates the other two. It tells us that the poor are lazy, that war is noble, that markets are natural, that domination is ordained, that some lives matter less, that ecological destruction is progress, that suffering is deserved, or that there is no alternative (Galtung, 1990).

The integration becomes sharper when structural violence is understood as damaged structural coupling. If living beings require ongoing congruence with their medium, then institutions that poison water, degrade food systems, destroy communities, fragment attention, intensify chronic insecurity, or exclude people from care are not merely unjust in an abstract sense. They damage the organism-medium relation through which life remains viable.

A child with asthma because diesel traffic is routed through a low-income neighbourhood is not only a victim of poor planning. The child's structural coupling has been degraded by institutional design. A worker whose time, body, and attention are exhausted by precarious labour is not merely experiencing inconvenience. Their range of thought, felt being, and action is being contracted by a social structure. A community whose river is polluted by extractive activity is not merely losing an amenity. Its medium of life is being violated.

Galtung gives McMurtry's disvalue a social anatomy. Maturana gives Galtung's structural violence biological depth. McMurtry gives both a value criterion. Together they allow the following definition:

Violence is any direct, structural, or cultural pattern that avoidably reduces, disables, or destroys the life-capacities of living beings in thought, felt being, action, relation, and ecological viability.

This definition expands the concept of violence without dissolving it into vagueness. It remains anchored in life-capacity. A condition is violent not because it frustrates preference, violates convention, or fails to maximize utility, but because it disables living possibility.

FIGURE 2. AUTOPOIETIC LIFE AND THE MEANS OF LIFE
Structural Coupling, Relationship, and the Expansion of Life-Capacities

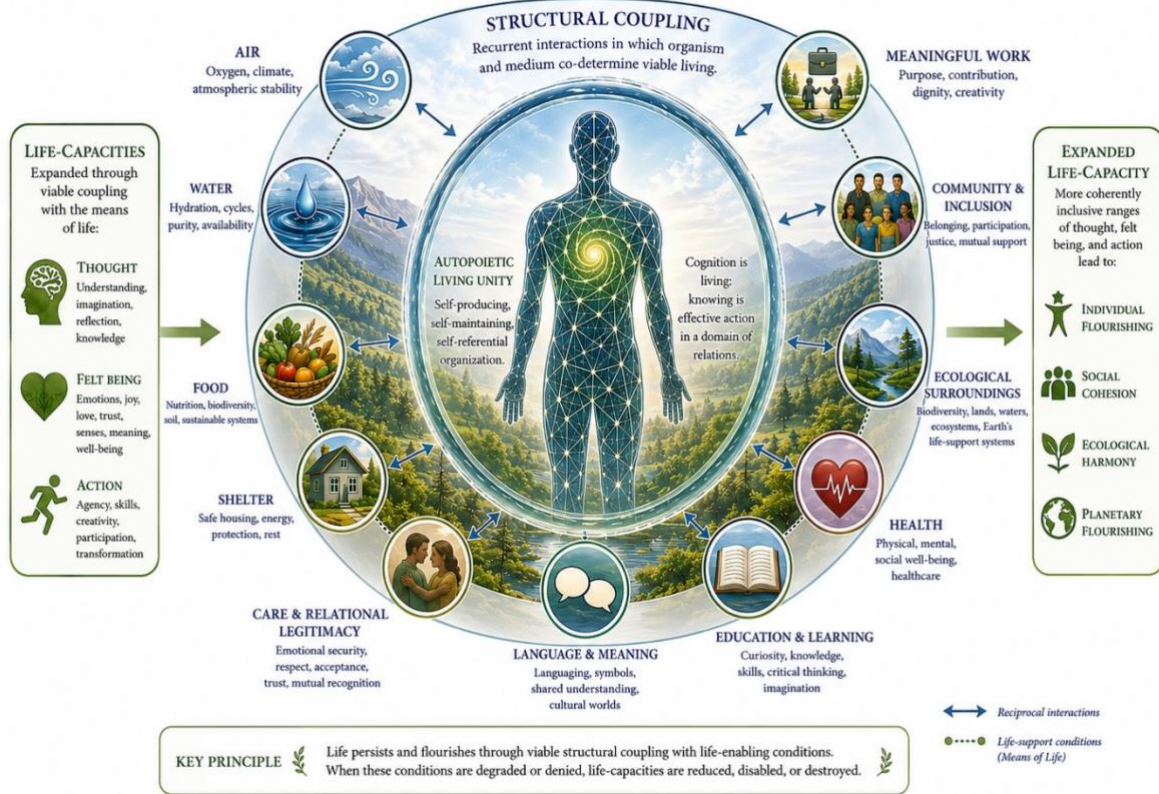


Figure 2. Autopoietic Life and the Means of Life

FIGURE 3. THE LIFE-VALUE / VIOLENCE MATRIX
How Forms of Violence Disable the Fields of Life—and How Peace Restores Them

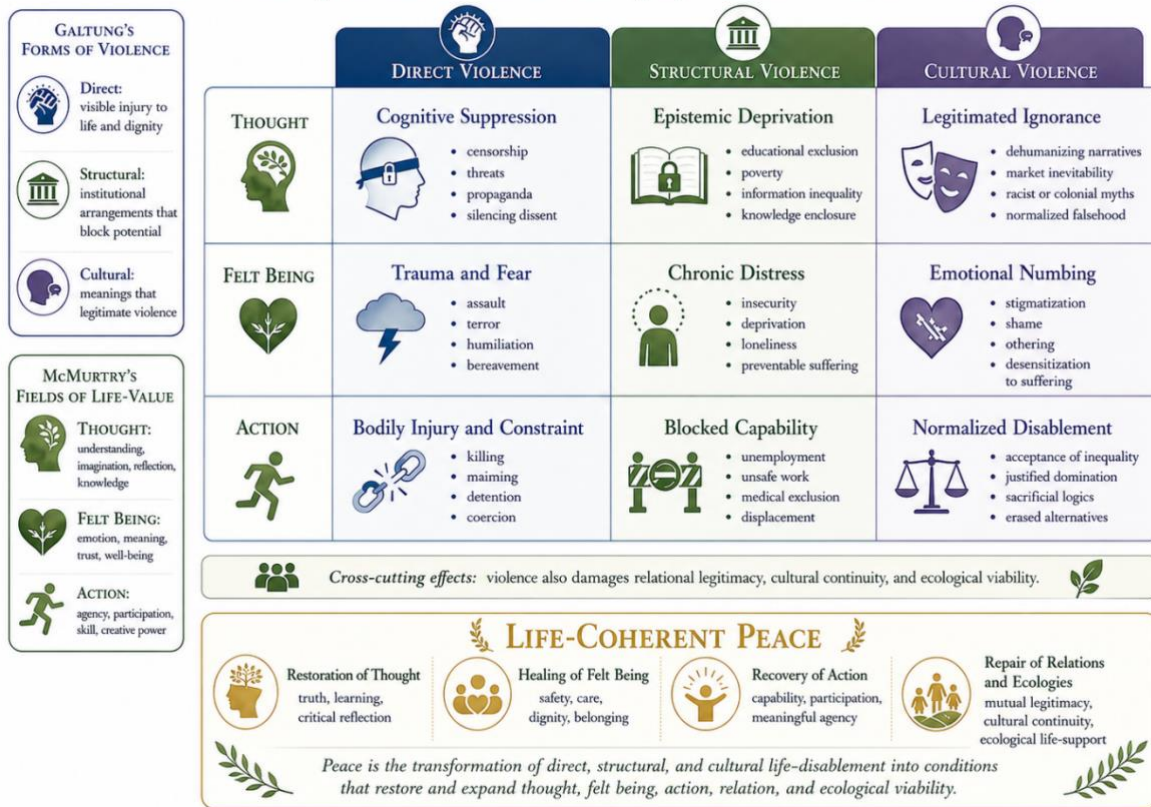


Figure 3. The Life-Value / Violence Matrix

4. Linguaging, Cultural Violence, and the Worlds We Bring Forth

Maturana and Varela argue that human beings do not simply mirror a pre-given world from outside. We bring forth worlds through our histories of action, distinction, languaging, and coexistence (Maturana & Varela, 1992). This does not mean that anything can be arbitrarily constructed. It means that human reality is disclosed through the distinctions by which observers live, coordinate, and act.

This insight matters because systems of violence are conserved not only by force but by language. Terms such as “economic growth,” “human resources,” “externalities,” “collateral damage,” “market discipline,” “competitive advantage,” “natural unemployment,” “surplus population,” “acceptable losses,” and “cost-benefit analysis” are not neutral descriptors. They can become linguistic mechanisms by which living beings are abstracted, distanced, instrumentalized, and made disposable.

A forest becomes “timber.” A worker becomes “labour cost.” A patient becomes “revenue.” A community becomes “market segment.” A dead civilian becomes “collateral damage.” A polluted river becomes an “externality.” The words do not merely describe the world; they

participate in bringing forth a world in which life-disablement can appear normal, necessary, efficient, or invisible.

Life-Coherent Peace therefore requires a transformation of distinctions. McMurtry's language of life-capital, life-ground, civil commons, life-need, and life-coherence is not merely theoretical terminology. It is an attempt to restore perception of what the ruling money-sequence hides. Galtung's language of structural and cultural violence similarly makes visible forms of harm that otherwise pass as development, order, efficiency, or progress.

Yet this transformation of language carries a danger. If a life-coherent vocabulary is used as a moral weapon rather than a dialogical instrument, it can become another form of domination. To name a system life-blind is not to declare the persons caught within it illegitimate. To criticize the money-sequence is not to dismiss the historical struggles of communities whose survival has depended on market integration. To expose structural violence is not to silence those who have learned to live within existing structures.

This distinction is essential. Maturana's domain of love requires accepting the other as legitimate in coexistence. It does not require accepting all practices, institutions, or systems as life-enabling. Persons are legitimate; life-disabling structures are not thereby exempt from critique. The challenge is to transform structures without humiliating, erasing, or epistemically colonizing the people whose lives are entangled with them.

Thus, Life-Coherent Peace must be both diagnostic and dialogical. It must name life-disablement clearly, but it must do so from a relational domain that keeps affected persons present as participants, not objects of correction. Otherwise, the framework risks reproducing the very cultural violence it seeks to disarm.

5. Love, Civil Commons, and the Risk of Bureaucratic Reduction

Maturana's concept of love is often misunderstood if read sentimentally. Love, for Maturana, is not romantic feeling, private affection, or moral softness. It is the relational domain in which the other appears as a legitimate other in coexistence (Maturana Romesín & Verden-Zöller, 2008). Love is therefore a condition of viable human social life. Without it, relations tend toward domination, fear, rivalry, resentment, obedience, exclusion, and control.

This is where Maturana deepens McMurtry's ethics. McMurtry tells us that the good is the enabling of life. Maturana reminds us that life cannot be enabled coherently from a domain that denies the legitimacy of living beings. A society cannot become life-coherent through domination, even when domination is justified in the name of life.

This has direct implications for the civil commons. McMurtry's civil commons refers to socially evolved institutions, infrastructures, practices, and legal arrangements that secure universal access to life goods: clean water, public health, education, parks, libraries, ecological protection, social security, public knowledge, shared culture, and life-protective law (McMurtry, 2013). In Galtung's terms, the civil commons reduces structural violence by

ensuring that access to life necessities is not determined solely by private purchasing power. It also reduces cultural violence by affirming that persons have legitimate life-needs that society must recognize.

Earlier formulations of this framework described the civil commons as “love institutionalized at social scale.” The phrase is powerful but must be handled carefully. Public systems are not sentimental. Bureaucracies are not morally pure. Administrative systems can become cold, coercive, corrupt, exclusionary, and self-protective. A water treatment plant is not the same as a loving relationship. A public health system is not an emotional domain. A school system can nourish thought, but it can also discipline, standardize, exclude, and reproduce hierarchy.

A more precise formulation is therefore needed:

The civil commons is the infrastructural expression of a society organized under the relational norm that the other’s life is legitimate.

This formulation avoids reducing love to bureaucracy while preserving the essential insight. A society that recognizes the legitimacy of life must build shared structures that secure the means of life. Private goodwill is insufficient. Charity is episodic. Sentiment is unstable. Complex societies require durable infrastructures through which life necessities are protected from abandonment, commodification, predation, and exclusion.

A clean water system says: your body matters.

A public health system says: your suffering matters.

A public school says: your thought matters.

A public park says: your play and felt being matter.

Labour protections say: your action, time, and dignity matter.

Ecological regulation says: the more-than-human life-ground matters.

But each of these institutions must remain accountable to the living beings it serves. The civil commons is not a command structure imposed from above. It is a set of shared life-enabling media that must be continually regenerated through democratic participation, transparency, repair, and responsiveness. When civil commons become rigid, punitive, humiliating, or inaccessible, they cease to embody relational legitimacy and begin to reproduce structural violence.

Life-Coherent Peace therefore requires both institution and relation. Love without structure remains fragile. Structure without love becomes domination. The civil commons is life-coherent only when it secures the means of life while conserving the autonomy, dignity, participation, and voice of those who live through it.

FIGURE 4. CIVIL COMMONS AS SOCIAL IMMUNE SYSTEM

Shared Life-Enabling Infrastructures, Relational Legitimacy, and Positive Peace

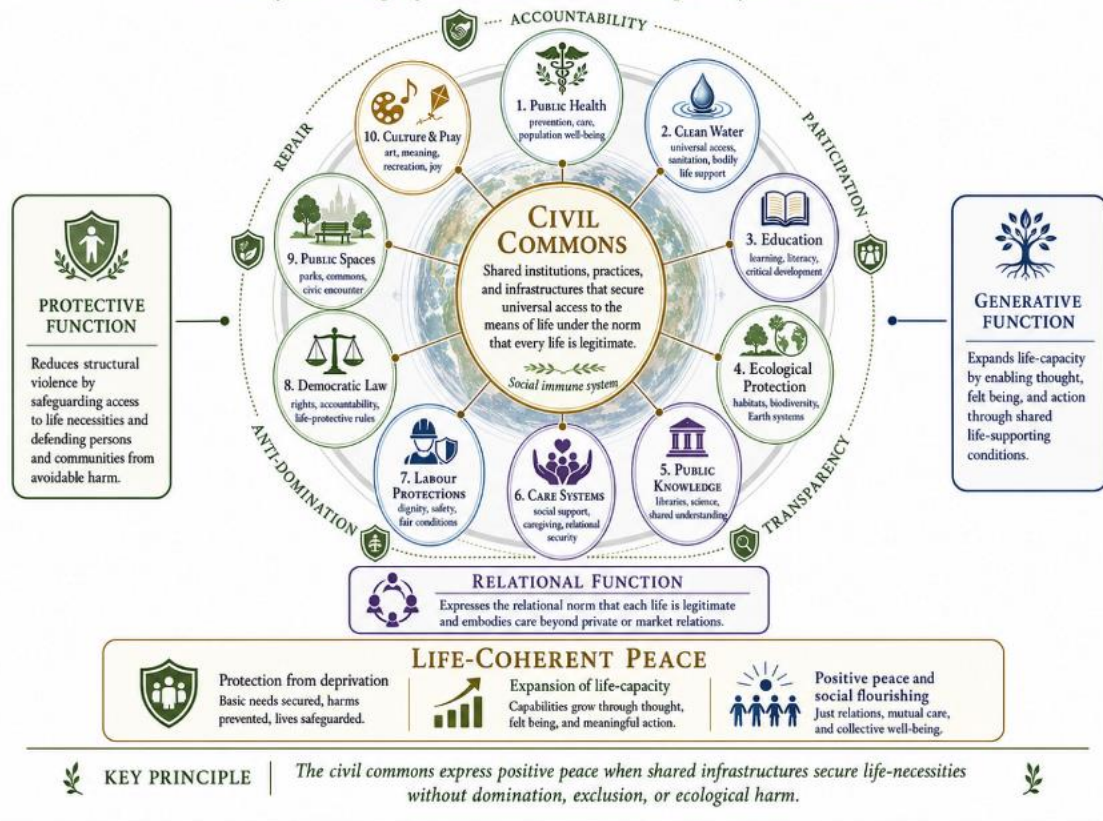


Figure 4. Civil Commons as Social Immune System

6. Life-Blind Organization as Organized Disvalue

A framework of Life-Coherent Peace must also name its opposite. The opposite is not merely war. It is **life-blind organization**.

A life-blind system is one whose operating code does not register life-capacity as its governing value. It may count money, commodities, votes, weapons, outputs, scores, clicks, growth rates, or strategic advantage while failing to register whether thought, felt being, action, ecological integrity, and social life are being enabled or destroyed.

McMurtry’s critique of the private money-value system is central here. The ruling system treats money-demand as value and life as instrument. It recognizes those who can pay, not those who need. It treats the unpriced life-ground as externality. It mistakes commodity growth for development. It treats civil commons as costs while treating profitable life-destruction as economic activity (McMurtry, 2011, 2013).

Galtung helps identify this as structural and cultural violence. When a population lacks access to clean water because public systems are underfunded, privatized, or subordinated to profit

extraction, this is structural violence. When the suffering that follows is explained as personal failure, market necessity, or fiscal discipline, cultural violence legitimates it.

When food systems produce obesity, malnutrition, soil depletion, animal suffering, and ecological damage while remaining profitable, this is organized life-disvalue. When such production is described as consumer choice or efficient agriculture, cultural violence conceals the harm.

When public health systems are weakened, care work is unpaid or underpaid, education becomes debt-financed credential competition, ecosystems are treated as extractive inputs, war economies are counted as growth, and loneliness becomes a market opportunity, life-blind organization has become normalized.

Maturana adds another layer. Life-blind systems are conserved not only through institutions but through emotional domains. If people are trained to see one another primarily as competitors, consumers, employees, enemies, burdens, resources, or threats, then the relational domain of love is displaced by fear, rivalry, resentment, obedience, and indifference. These emotional domains then reproduce the institutions that produced them.

Life-Coherent Peace therefore requires more than policy reform. It requires a transformation of value, structure, language, emotion, and institutional design.

7. Applications: Five Domains of Life-Coherent Transformation

7.1 Health

A life-blind health system treats disease primarily as an individual biological malfunction to be repaired after breakdown. This model is indispensable for acute care, but insufficient as a paradigm of health. Life-Coherent Peace reframes health as the conservation and expansion of structural coupling across biological, psychological, social, ecological, and cultural domains.

Clean air, safe water, nourishing food, secure housing, meaningful work, social belonging, ecological stability, truthful information, and protection from violence are not merely social determinants outside medicine. They are conditions of biological viability. A life-coherent health system therefore shifts its centre of gravity toward prevention, care, community, ecological protection, and the civil commons that sustain life before disease appears.

7.2 Economy

A life-blind economy is organized by the money-sequence: money uses life as means to become more money. A life-coherent economy is a provisioning system whose legitimate purpose is to secure the means of life without degrading the ecological life-ground.

Efficiency must therefore be redefined. A system is not efficient because it produces more commodities at lower monetary cost while shifting injury onto bodies, communities, and ecosystems. It is efficient only if it enables life-capacity with minimal waste, domination, disease, ecological damage, and future burden.

7.3 Education

A life-blind education system reduces learning to competition, credentialing, labour-market preparation, and standardized performance. A life-coherent education system cultivates thought, felt being, action, and relational responsibility. It enables students to inquire, imagine, care, create, deliberate, understand systems, and participate in the shared world.

Education is therefore not merely human capital formation. It is a civil commons of world-disclosure.

7.4 Ecology

A life-blind ecological order treats ecosystems as resources, sinks, externalities, commodities, or obstacles to development. Life-Coherent Peace recognizes ecosystems as the planetary medium of structural coupling. Human life cannot flourish by disabling the biospheric conditions that make human life possible.

Ecology is not one policy domain among others. It is the life-ground of all domains.

7.5 Governance

Life-blind governance preserves order, growth, legitimacy, or strategic advantage while failing to ask whether institutions enable life-capacity. Life-coherent governance asks how policies affect thought, felt being, action, structural coupling, ecological viability, direct violence, structural violence, cultural violence, and the civil commons.

Yet governance must also avoid coercive life-value. Life cannot be forced to flourish. Policies imposed without dialogue may reproduce domination even when motivated by protection. Life-coherent governance must therefore be participatory, transparent, reparative, accountable, and oriented toward minimum sufficient force.

8. Competing Life-Needs and the Problem of Tragic Choice

The framework is strongest when diagnosing life-blind money-sequences. It becomes more difficult when different life-enabling claims come into conflict. Life is not always a simple battle between value and disvalue. Sometimes a community faces a conflict between two or more genuine life-needs.

Consider a displaced population requiring shelter and food. Immediate human survival may demand land, materials, water, sanitation, and agricultural space. Yet the available land may be part of an ancient forest that sustains biodiversity, regulates water cycles, stores carbon, and carries cultural meaning for an Indigenous community. To refuse shelter may disable human life-capacity. To clear the forest may disable ecological life-support and cultural continuity. Both sides invoke life. Neither can be dismissed as mere preference.

This kind of case reveals why Life-Coherent Peace cannot be a static checklist or moral slogan. It must become a disciplined method of arbitration. The goal is not to eliminate conflict. Conflict is inevitable among living beings and communities with different histories, needs, and worlds. The aim is to prevent conflict from becoming domination, abandonment, structural violence, or cultural erasure.

A life-coherent response would begin by rejecting two false solutions. The first false solution is money-sequence arbitration: assign monetary value to the forest, compare it to the monetary value of development, and choose the option with the higher economic return. This is life-blind because it converts non-substitutable life-ground into priced preference. The second false solution is abstract moral absolutism: protect the forest regardless of human displacement, or house the displaced population regardless of ecological and cultural destruction. This risks imposing sacrifice on one living community in the name of another.

The task is instead to seek **compossible flourishing**: arrangements that conserve as many life-capacities as possible across persons, communities, species, and future generations. In the forest-settlement case, this might require emergency non-forest shelter options, temporary housing on already degraded land, participatory planning with displaced and Indigenous communities, regenerative building materials, strict no-go ecological zones, food systems that do not require forest clearing, land restoration, shared governance, and ongoing monitoring of ecological and social harms.

The key principle is not equal satisfaction of all preferences. It is the protection and development of life-necessities under conditions of mutual legitimacy, ecological constraint, and minimum avoidable harm.

This leads to the need for a protocol.

9. From Checklist to Method: The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol

The Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol is proposed as a method for addressing conflicts among life-enabling claims. It is not a mechanical formula that produces certainty. It is a disciplined, dialogical, revisable procedure for preventing life-value from becoming coercive moralism or technocratic control.

9.1 Identify the living unities affected

The first task is to identify whose life-capacities are at stake: individuals, families, workers, communities, Indigenous peoples, ecosystems, species, watersheds, future generations, and planetary systems. This prevents the analysis from narrowing prematurely to the most powerful, visible, or monetizable interests.

9.2 Map affected life-capacities

The next task is to ask how each affected unity's capacities for thought, felt being, action, relation, cultural continuity, and ecological viability are enabled or disabled. This grounds the inquiry in McMurtry's value criterion rather than preference aggregation.

9.3 Distinguish needs from wants and means from substitutes

Not all claims have equal life-value weight. Universal means of life—water, food, shelter, care, health, ecological viability, safety, participation, and cultural continuity—must be distinguished from discretionary wants, status goods, speculative gains, or money-sequence claims.

9.4 Identify thresholds of irreversibility and non-substitutability

Some harms can be repaired; others cannot. Extinction, watershed collapse, cultural destruction, death, severe trauma, and irreversible ecological degradation carry special weight. Life-coherent arbitration must identify thresholds beyond which compensation is inadequate.

9.5 Seek compossible options before sacrificial trade-offs

The protocol should first search for arrangements that preserve multiple life-capacities together. Sacrifice should not be presumed. Alternative sites, phased transitions, restorative design, cooperative ownership, ecological repair, redistribution, and public investment may reveal possibilities hidden by narrow cost-benefit analysis.

9.6 Use minimum sufficient force

Where constraint is unavoidable, the least dominating and least life-disabling intervention should be preferred. This principle protects the framework from becoming coercive. Life cannot be coherently enabled through unnecessary humiliation, exclusion, militarization, surveillance, or bureaucratic violence.

9.7 Require participatory languaging

Those affected must participate in the distinctions by which the situation is defined. Affected communities are not data points. They are living observers who bring forth worlds through

language, memory, care, and history. Without participatory languaging, life-coherence becomes external control.

9.8 Monitor, repair, and revise

Life-coherent judgment is recursive. Policies must be monitored for unintended harm and revised when they disable life. This is consistent with living systems: viability is maintained through ongoing regulation, repair, and adaptation, not one-time design.

Table 1. Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol: Questions, Evidence, Risks, and Outputs

Step	Guiding question	Evidence to gather	Main risk if ignored	Practical output
1. Identify affected living unities	Who or what is affected by this decision?	Stakeholder mapping; ecological mapping; future-generation implications; affected communities; species and habitats	Invisible victims; narrow human or economic framing	Full life-field map
2. Map life-capacities	How are thought, felt being, action, relation, culture, and ecological viability affected?	Health data; livelihood data; community testimony; ecological indicators; cultural impacts	Reducing harm to money loss or abstract preference	Life-capacity impact profile
3. Distinguish needs from wants	Which claims concern universal means of life, and which concern discretionary wants or money-sequence interests?	Water, food, shelter, health, safety, education, care, ecological dependence, cultural continuity	Treating luxury, profit, or convenience as equal to life-necessity	Ranked needs matrix
4. Identify thresholds	Which harms are irreversible, non-substitutable, cumulative, or urgent?	Extinction risk; watershed collapse; mortality; severe trauma; displacement; cultural loss; ecosystem tipping points	Assuming all losses are compensable	Non-negotiable thresholds and red lines

5. Seek compossibility	What options preserve multiple life-capacities together?	Alternatives analysis; regenerative design; relocation options; transition planning; public investment; cooperative models	Premature sacrifice of one life-domain for another	Compossible option set
6. Use minimum sufficient force	What is the least dominating intervention capable of preventing serious life-disablement?	Legal options; social supports; enforcement alternatives; restorative mechanisms; rights protections	Coercive life-value; bureaucratic domination; paternalism	Least-harm intervention pathway
7. Require participatory languaging	Have affected people participated in defining the problem and the solution?	Deliberative forums; Indigenous consultation; worker assemblies; community review; public reasoning	Epistemic violence; technocratic imposition; cultural erasure	Participatory decision record
8. Monitor, repair, revise	What harms emerge after implementation, and how will they be corrected?	Monitoring indicators; grievance systems; ecological audits; social review; adaptive governance	Static policy failure; uncorrected harm; institutional self-protection	Revision and repair cycle

This table clarifies that the Life-Coherence Arbitration Protocol is not a substitute for politics, ethics, law, ecology, or democratic deliberation. It is a way of disciplining them around the life-ground. Its purpose is to prevent two common failures: first, the reduction of life-conflict to money-sequence calculation; second, the imposition of one life-claim upon another without adequate recognition, participation, repair, or ecological constraint. The protocol therefore converts Life-Coherent Peace from an ideal into a method of practical judgment.

10. The Life-Coherence Test

The Life-Coherence Test should not be read as a mechanical checklist that generates automatic answers. Such a use would contradict the Maturanan basis of the framework, because no observer stands outside the living world with complete, neutral, coercion-free

access to reality. The test is instead a disciplined practice of **life-grounded judgment**. It asks observers, policymakers, communities, institutions, and affected persons to disclose the life-effects of a given arrangement: whose capacities are expanded, whose are contracted, whose means of life are secured, whose are made precarious, whose world is recognized, and whose world is erased.

This means that the Life-Coherence Test must be used dialogically. It is not a technocratic instrument for experts to impose life-value upon others. Nor is it a moral weapon by which one group declares itself the guardian of life and silences competing claims. It is a structured mode of inquiry for making visible the life-enabling and life-disabling consequences of decisions. It must therefore be paired with participatory assessment, conflict arbitration, and ongoing revision.

This distinction is crucial. Life-Coherent Peace cannot be imposed by domination without ceasing to be life-coherent. A policy that secures ecological protection by humiliating, dispossessing, or silencing vulnerable communities reproduces structural violence even if it claims life-protection as its aim. Conversely, a policy that secures short-term human need by destroying non-substitutable ecological life-support undermines the planetary medium of future life. The test therefore requires a second methodological layer: a protocol for arbitrating conflicts among genuine life-needs.

The Life-Coherence Test asks:

1. **Life-capacity:** Does the arrangement expand or contract the capacities of affected beings for thought, felt being, and action?
2. **Means of life:** Does it secure or deprive access to universal means of life such as water, food, shelter, care, health, education, ecological stability, and meaningful participation?
3. **Civil commons:** Does it strengthen or weaken shared life-enabling institutions, infrastructures, and practices?
4. **Violence:** Does it reduce or reproduce direct, structural, and cultural violence?
5. **Ecological life-ground:** Does it conserve or degrade the ecosystems, species, water cycles, soil systems, climate stability, and biospheric conditions on which life depends?
6. **Relational domain:** Does it arise from mutual legitimacy, dialogue, and responsibility, or from domination, fear, exclusion, humiliation, and control?
7. **Value sequence:** Does it subordinate money-sequences to life-sequences, or life-sequences to money-sequences?
8. **Conflict handling:** Where life-needs conflict, does it use a participatory arbitration process oriented toward compossible flourishing, minimum sufficient force, and repair?

The eighth question is added because no framework of peace is adequate unless it can address conflicts among real life-needs. The test is not meant to eliminate judgment. It is meant to discipline judgment by requiring that hidden life-effects be made visible.

FIGURE 5. THE LIFE-COHERENCE TEST AS RECURSIVE METHOD
A Dialogical Framework for Evaluating Policies, Institutions, Technologies, and Practices Under Conditions of Competing Life-Needs

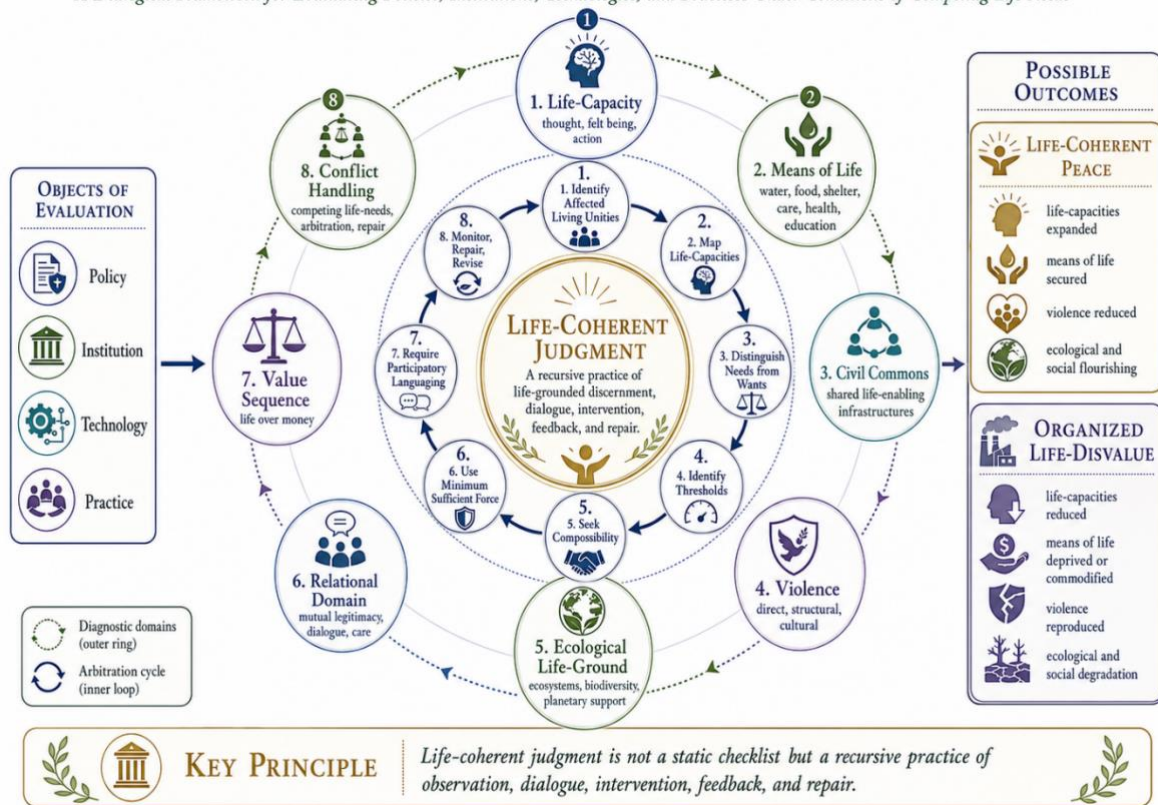


Figure 5. The Life-Coherence Test as Recursive Method

11. Worked Case Study: Water Privatization and the Civil Commons Alternative

The value of the Life-Coherence Test becomes clearer when applied to a concrete case. Consider a municipality that transfers control of its water infrastructure to a private investment entity. The stated justification is efficiency, fiscal relief, technical modernization, and reduced public burden. Under conventional economic language, the transaction may appear rational. The water system becomes an asset. Users become customers. Access becomes a priced service. Non-payment becomes a contractual failure. Shut-off becomes enforcement.

A life-coherent analysis asks different questions.

11.1 Life-capacity

Water is not an optional commodity. It is a biological condition of autopoiesis and structural coupling. Loss of water access immediately threatens bodily health, hygiene, felt security, family care, school participation, and social dignity. A system that permits water shut-offs for inability to pay disables thought, felt being, and action at the most basic level.

11.2 Means of life

Because water is a universal means of life, access cannot coherently be governed solely by private purchasing power. Pricing may be necessary for maintenance, conservation, and responsible use, but inability to pay cannot justify deprivation of the biological means of living. To treat water as a commodity before treating it as a life-necessity is to invert the life-sequence.

11.3 Civil commons

Privatization may weaken the civil commons if it transfers control, accountability, and surplus away from public life-support and toward private extraction. A water system is not merely a delivery mechanism. It is a shared organ of public health, ecological stewardship, social trust, and intergenerational responsibility.

11.4 Violence

Water deprivation is structural violence when institutional rules produce avoidable harm without a visible attacker. It becomes cultural violence when the resulting suffering is justified as personal irresponsibility, market discipline, efficiency, or fiscal necessity. A family without water is then blamed for failing to pay, while the life-blind structure of access disappears from view.

11.5 Ecological life-ground

A privatized water system may also degrade ecological life-support if profit incentives encourage over-extraction, deferred maintenance, contamination risk, or underinvestment in watershed protection. A life-coherent water system must govern the entire water cycle, not merely the sale of treated water.

11.6 Relational domain

If decisions are made through opaque contracts, expert capture, investor pressure, or fiscal desperation without meaningful participation from affected communities, the process arises from domination rather than mutual legitimacy. Affected persons are treated as ratepayers, not as living participants in a shared water commons.

11.7 Value sequence

The decisive question is whether money serves water-as-life or water-as-life serves money. If revenue extraction, shareholder return, or debt servicing overrides universal access, public

health, ecological stewardship, and democratic accountability, the money-sequence has subordinated the life-sequence.

11.8 Conflict handling

Real tensions remain. Water infrastructure requires maintenance, technical expertise, conservation, financing, and protection from waste. Life-Coherent Peace does not deny these constraints. It asks that they be addressed without depriving people of life-necessity or degrading watersheds. A civil commons alternative could include public or cooperative ownership, lifeline water guarantees, progressive tariffs, ecological watershed governance, transparent budgeting, community participation, anti-corruption safeguards, conservation incentives, and reinvestment of surplus into maintenance and restoration.

Table 2. Applying the Life-Coherence Test to Water Privatization and a Civil Commons Alternative

Life-Coherence domain	Privatized water infrastructure	Civil commons water system
Life-capacity	Access depends on purchasing power; shut-offs can disable health, dignity, care, education, and household functioning	Universal lifeline access protects bodily viability, hygiene, family care, and social dignity
Means of life	Water is treated primarily as a commodity and revenue stream	Water is treated first as a universal means of life, with pricing subordinate to access and conservation
Civil commons	Public control, accountability, and surplus may be transferred to private owners or investors	Public, cooperative, or commons-based governance retains water as shared life-support infrastructure
Violence	Non-payment shut-offs, exclusion, contamination, or underinvestment can become structural violence	Structural violence is reduced by guaranteeing baseline access and reinvesting in maintenance and protection
Cultural violence	Market language frames deprivation as personal failure, inefficiency, or fiscal necessity	Life-ground language frames water as a shared condition of bodily and ecological survival
Ecological life-ground	Profit incentives may encourage over-extraction, deferred maintenance, or narrow service delivery	Watershed protection, ecological restoration, and long-term maintenance become core responsibilities
Relational domain	Users are treated primarily as customers or ratepayers	Residents are treated as participants in a shared life-support system
Value sequence	Money-sequence risk: water-as-life becomes means to revenue extraction	Life-sequence aim: public finance and administration serve water-as-life

Conflict handling	Affordability, conservation, and infrastructure costs may be handled through punitive enforcement	Tensions are addressed through lifeline guarantees, progressive tariffs, conservation rules, public budgeting, and participatory governance
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This comparison shows why the Life-Coherence Test is not merely oppositional. It does not simply declare privatization bad and public ownership good in all possible cases. Rather, it asks how each arrangement actually functions. A publicly owned water system can also become life-disabling if it is corrupt, inaccessible, ecologically negligent, or punitive. A private actor may provide technical capacity, but if governance subordinates universal access and watershed protection to revenue extraction, the life-sequence has been inverted. The decisive issue is therefore not ownership in abstraction, but whether the institutional design secures water as a universal means of life, protects the ecological water cycle, prevents structural violence, and remains accountable to affected communities.

12. Limits and Safeguards: Preventing Coercive Life-Value

Life-Coherent Peace must guard against its own possible misuse. Any framework that claims to identify what enables life risks becoming coercive if it is enacted without humility, participation, and accountability. The danger is not theoretical. Political projects have often justified domination in the name of order, progress, security, salvation, development, or even liberation. A life-coherent framework must therefore include safeguards against becoming a new language of control.

The first safeguard is **anti-reductionism**. Life-capacity cannot be reduced to a single indicator, expert score, economic measure, or administrative target. Thought, felt being, action, relation, culture, and ecological viability are multidimensional and must be interpreted in context.

The second safeguard is **participatory legitimacy**. Those affected by a policy must not merely be counted. They must participate in the distinctions through which the policy is defined. This follows directly from Maturana's understanding of human beings as languaging and emotioning beings who bring forth worlds in coexistence.

The third safeguard is **minimum sufficient force**. Life-protective intervention may sometimes require constraint, especially where powerful systems are actively disabling life. But constraint must be proportionate, accountable, revisable, and directed toward preventing harm rather than producing obedience.

The fourth safeguard is **ecological humility**. Human needs are real and urgent, but they cannot be secured by destroying the planetary life-ground that makes their future satisfaction possible.

The fifth safeguard is **recursive repair**. A policy does not become life-coherent because it is declared so at the moment of design. It becomes life-coherent only through ongoing monitoring, correction, accountability, and repair.

These safeguards clarify that Life-Coherent Peace is neither technocracy nor moral absolutism. It is a disciplined, dialogical, life-grounded practice of social learning under constraint.

13. Conclusion: A Secular Covenant for Life on Earth

Life-Coherent Peace is not a final state without conflict. Such a condition would be neither biologically plausible nor politically desirable. Living beings perturb one another. Communities disagree. Needs collide. Worlds are brought forth through different histories of language, memory, ecology, suffering, and aspiration. A peace framework that imagines the disappearance of conflict would confuse peace with stasis.

The aim is not to abolish conflict but to transform the conditions under which conflict is handled. Conflict becomes life-destructive when it is organized through domination, abandonment, humiliation, structural violence, cultural erasure, or ecological destruction. Conflict becomes life-coherent when it is held within mutual legitimacy, life-need recognition, ecological constraint, participatory languaging, and repair.

The contribution of this paper is therefore not a blueprint for a perfect society. It is a framework for asking, again and again, whether our institutions, languages, economies, technologies, and policies enable or disable the capacities of living beings to think, feel, act, relate, and flourish within the planetary conditions that make life possible.

McMurtry gives the value criterion: the good enables life-capacity; disvalue disables it. Maturana gives the living ground: human beings are autonomous, structurally coupled, languaging and emotioning beings who cannot coherently flourish under domination. Galtung gives the diagnostic grammar: violence appears directly, structurally, and culturally wherever avoidable life-disablement is organized and legitimated.

Their integration yields a simple but demanding proposition:

A society is peaceful only to the extent that its institutions, languages, economies, ecologies, and relational domains conserve and expand the life-capacities of persons, communities, species, and planetary systems without disabling the life-ground of others.

This proposition is not a technocratic formula. It is not a command system. It does not authorize experts, states, parties, or movements to impose flourishing by coercion. It is a disciplined orientation for judgment, dialogue, design, and repair.

Life-Coherent Peace requires civil commons, but not bureaucratic domination. It requires love, but not sentimentality. It requires anti-violence, but not passivity. It requires objective

attention to life-capacity, but not moral absolutism. It requires ecological limits, but not sacrificial abandonment of vulnerable people. It requires language that names harm, but not language that humiliates the people entangled in harmful systems.

In this sense, Life-Coherent Peace is a secular covenant for life on Earth. It asks individuals, institutions, and civilizations to reorganize value around a primary question:

Does this way of living enable or disable the capacities of living beings to think, feel, act, relate, and flourish within the planetary conditions that make life possible?

Where the answer is enabling, life-coherence is present. Where the answer is disabling, peace remains unfinished.

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