

ACADEMIC WHITE PAPER

# Life-Coherent Politics

*From Power-Struggle to the  
Governance of Shared Life-Capacity*



Conserve Life    ♦    Regenerate Commons    ♦    Preserve Margins  
Reduce Violence    ♦    Expand Participation    ♦    Repair Harm

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# Life-Coherent Politics

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Academic White Paper

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## Abstract

Modern politics is increasingly organized around competition for power, management of scarcity, identity conflict, institutional control, market growth, and crisis response. Yet these dominant frames often fail to ask the prior question upon which all political legitimacy depends: whether the political order protects, repairs, and expands the conditions of life. This white paper develops the concept of **life-coherent politics** as a framework for re-grounding political thought and practice in the shared life-capacity of persons, communities, ecosystems, and future generations.

Drawing on Humberto Maturana's biology of coexistence and world-bringing, John McMurtry's life-value onto-axiology and civil commons, Johan Galtung's analysis of direct, structural, and cultural violence, Elinor Ostrom's commons governance, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and ecological frameworks such as the planetary boundaries and Doughnut models, this paper argues that politics becomes life-coherent when it conserves the conditions by which living beings can meet life necessities, develop capacities, participate meaningfully, transform conflict without domination, and remain within ecological limits (Maturana, 1988; McMurtry, 2011; Galtung, 1969, 1990; Ostrom, 1990; Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Rockström et al., 2009; Raworth, 2012, 2017).

The central claim is that politics is not first the struggle to control society, but the collective practice of governing the conditions of shared viability. A life-coherent political order must therefore be judged not by partisan victory, ideological purity, economic growth, national power, or procedural formalism alone, but by whether it reduces life-capacity suppression, regenerates civil and ecological commons, preserves social and ecological margins, expands real options for participation, and corrects institutional patterns that normalize harm.

The paper proposes a diagnostic grammar of life-coherent politics organized around seven functional questions: What life-ground is being protected or degraded? Whose necessities are unmet? What forms of violence are being normalized? Which commons are being enclosed or regenerated? Who participates in shaping the worlds that shape them? Where are margins being exhausted? What forms of repair restore life-capacity without imposing new domination? The

paper concludes that the future of democratic, ecological, legal, constitutional, and peace-oriented governance depends on a shift from life-blind politics to politics as the art of conserving and repairing the worlds in which life can continue.

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## Keywords

Life-coherent politics; life-value; civil commons; structural violence; cultural violence; ecological democracy; capabilities; commons governance; planetary boundaries; Doughnut economics; constitutional life-guardianship; sovereignty as stewardship; political legitimacy; life-capacity; governance of repair.

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## Executive Summary

Politics is commonly understood as the contest over power: who rules, who distributes resources, who defines law, who belongs, who commands security, who wins elections, and whose ideology prevails. These are real political questions, but they are not the first political question. Before any society can argue over policies, parties, rights, markets, sovereignty, or institutions, it must remain alive. It must conserve the conditions by which persons, communities, ecosystems, and future generations can continue to live, develop, belong, and participate.

This white paper proposes **life-coherent politics** as a framework for re-grounding politics in this prior condition.

Life-coherent politics begins from the recognition that every political order conserves a world. It organizes perception, value, authority, economy, law, security, education, care, and participation in ways that either expand or suppress life-capacity. The question is therefore not only whether a political system is legal, popular, efficient, profitable, sovereign, or stable. The deeper question is: **what pattern of life does it conserve?**

A political order is life-coherent when it protects universal life necessities, reduces direct and structural violence, regenerates the civil and ecological commons, secures meaningful participation, preserves social and ecological margins, and expands real options for persons and communities under conditions of constraint (Galtung, 1969, 1990; McMurtry, 2011; Ostrom, 1990; Sen, 1999). It also requires legal and constitutional forms capable of protecting the life-ground, securing rights as life-capacity protections, and redefining sovereignty as responsibility within nested ecological and human interdependence (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966a, 1966b, 2022).

A political order is life-blind when it can register money, votes, growth, force, status, or legal authority, but cannot adequately register whether the life-ground itself is being degraded.

This paper argues that many contemporary political crises—polarization, ecological breakdown, public distrust, democratic erosion, inequality, technocratic alienation, administrative cruelty, and normalized precarity—are symptoms of a deeper disorder: politics has been severed from the life-ground. It has become possible for systems to appear successful while depleting the very conditions that make life possible.

Life-coherent politics does not reduce politics to left or right, state or market, individual or collective, local or global, secular or spiritual. Instead, it places all political forms under a higher criterion: whether they conserve and repair life-capacity across scales. It therefore asks of every policy, law, budget, institution, party, technology, and development pathway:

1. Does it protect the life-ground?
2. Does it meet life necessities?
3. Does it reduce violence and domination?
4. Does it regenerate commons?
5. Does it expand meaningful participation?
6. Does it preserve margins for uncertainty, diversity, and future life?
7. Does it repair harm without producing new harm?

The practical aim of life-coherent politics is not utopia, purity, total harmony, or the erasure of conflict. It is the disciplined governance of shared viability under real constraints. It recognizes tragic choice, conflict, scarcity, and uncertainty, but refuses to normalize sacrifice zones, life-blind growth, structural abandonment, or domination as political necessities.

At its deepest level, life-coherent politics transforms the meaning of power. Power is not merely the ability to compel, extract, dominate, persuade, or win. Legitimate power is the capacity to coordinate the conditions under which life can flourish without destroying the life-ground on which it depends.

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## Preface: Why Politics Must Return to Life

Politics has too often been reduced to the visible contest for authority: parties, elections, leaders, laws, markets, states, identities, borders, ideologies, and institutions. These are important, but they are not primary. They are political forms. They are not the life-ground that makes politics possible.

Before there can be a citizen, voter, worker, consumer, patient, student, migrant, entrepreneur, official, dissident, or ruler, there must be a living being whose conditions of life are sufficiently conserved. There must be breathable air, potable water, food, shelter, care, language, trust, ecological continuity, bodily security, emotional development, and meaningful participation in a shared world. Politics begins, whether it knows it or not, from these conditions.

The failure to recognize this priority is the central disorder of life-blind politics. A society may increase gross domestic product while degrading health, soil, water, trust, attention, family life, civic meaning, and ecological stability. A state may preserve formal legality while normalizing structural abandonment. A democracy may retain elections while citizens lose effective capacity to shape the conditions that govern them. A market may expand choice while narrowing viable options. A security regime may protect borders while destroying the relational conditions of peace. A technology system may increase connection while weakening attention, trust, and shared reality.

Life-coherent politics begins from a different premise: political legitimacy is grounded in the conservation and expansion of life-capacity.

This does not mean that politics can avoid conflict, uncertainty, tragedy, or constraint. No living system is free from disturbance. Every society must make hard choices under imperfect knowledge. But the life-coherent question is not whether conflict can be abolished. The question is whether conflict is governed in ways that preserve the life-ground, reduce domination, protect the vulnerable, maintain margins, and expand real possibilities for repair.

Politics, at its deepest level, is the art of conserving the worlds in which life can continue (Maturana, 1988; McMurtry, 2011).

This white paper develops that claim.

It proposes a framework for re-seeing politics not as the struggle for domination, not as the management of populations for growth, not as the administration of scarcity, and not as the performance of ideological identity, but as the collective governance of shared viability. It asks what political life becomes when the central criterion is not victory, command, profit, or procedural compliance, but life-coherence.

The first task, then, is diagnostic: to understand how politics becomes life-blind even while its institutions continue to function.

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# Part I. Re-Grounding Politics in Life

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## 1. The Crisis of Life-Blind Politics

The crises of contemporary political life are often described separately: polarization, inequality, climate breakdown, democratic erosion, disinformation, corruption, institutional mistrust, economic precarity, migration, war, public-health failure, and ecological degradation. Each of these crises has its own history, mechanisms, and policy literature. Yet they also share a deeper pattern: political systems are increasingly unable to perceive, protect, and regenerate the conditions of life on which their legitimacy depends.

This is the crisis of **life-blind politics**.

Life-blind politics is not simply bad politics, corrupt politics, authoritarian politics, or ineffective politics. It is politics organized by categories of perception and value that can register power, wealth, growth, legality, productivity, status, security, and electoral victory while failing to register the degradation of life-capacity itself. It can measure fiscal deficit while ignoring trust deficit. It can defend market freedom while eroding real freedom (Sen, 1999; McMurtry, 2011). It can intensify production while exhausting caregivers, soils, watersheds, nervous systems, and communities. It can protect formal rights while leaving people without the material and relational conditions required to exercise them.

Life-blind politics is therefore not confined to any single ideology. It may appear in authoritarian command systems, technocratic bureaucracies, extractive market orders, polarized democracies, militarized security states, philanthropic managerialism, or identity-based factionalism. Its defining feature is not a specific doctrine, but a failure of political perception: the inability to see life as the primary ground of value and legitimacy.

This failure is especially dangerous because modern societies can continue to function administratively while becoming progressively less viable. Budgets may be passed, elections held, markets opened, infrastructure built, data collected, and laws enforced, while the underlying life-field deteriorates. Politics may appear active while becoming incapable of repair.

A life-coherent framework therefore begins by distinguishing between **system-maintenance** and **life-maintenance**.

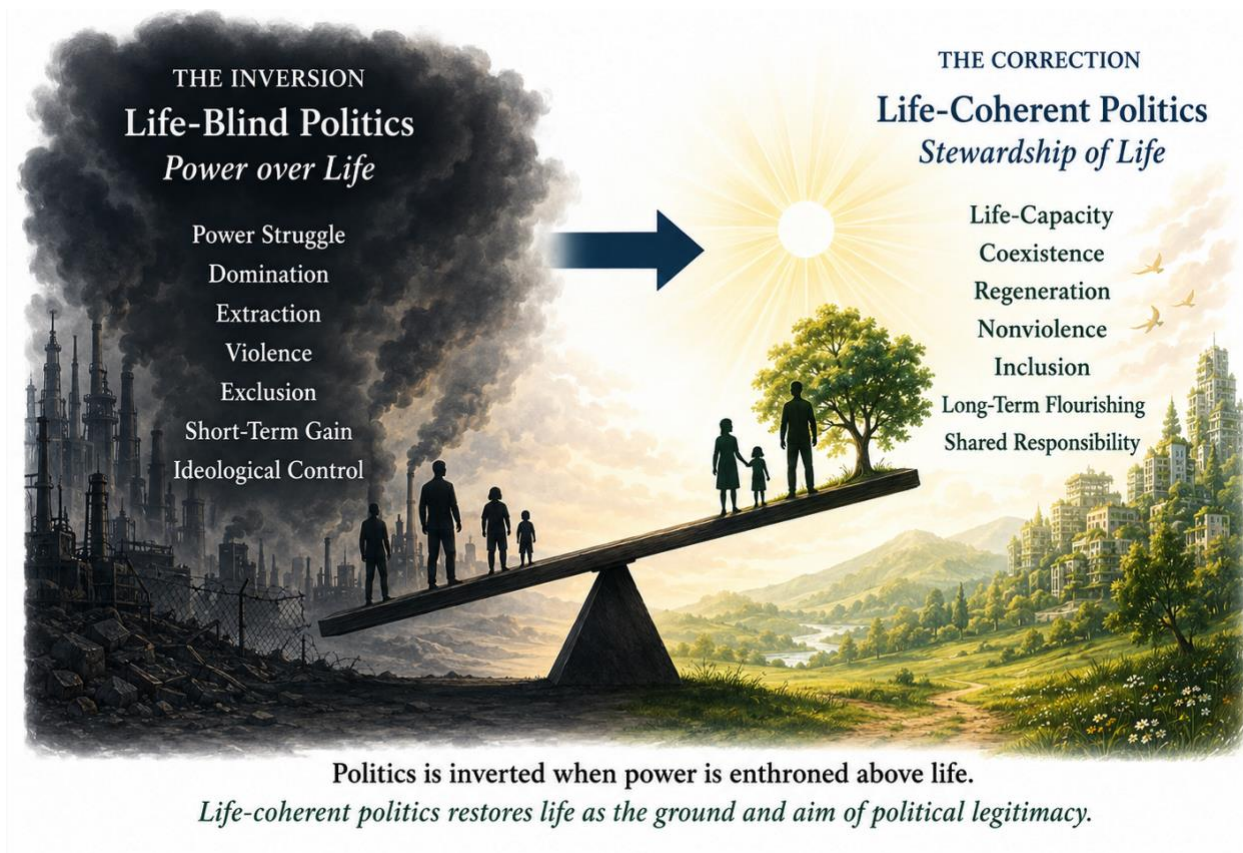
System-maintenance asks whether existing institutions continue to operate.

Life-maintenance asks whether the operation of those institutions protects and expands the conditions of living capacity.

The two are not identical. Indeed, much political harm occurs when institutions preserve themselves by transferring cost onto persons, communities, ecosystems, or future generations. Bureaucracies may preserve procedure at the expense of care. Markets may preserve profit at the expense of livelihood. Parties may preserve identity at the expense of truth. States may preserve security at the expense of dignity. Development systems may preserve growth at the expense of ecological continuity.

This is the great danger: when the system demands sacrifice from life and calls that sacrifice realism (McMurtry, 1998, 2013).

Life-coherent politics reverses this inversion. It asks every system to justify itself before life.



**Figure 1. The Great Political Inversion.** Life-blind politics requires living beings, communities, ecosystems, and future generations to adapt to system imperatives. Life-coherent politics reverses this misordering by requiring all systems of power, economy, law, security, and technology to remain answerable to the life-ground.

If life-blind politics is defined by the failure to perceive and protect life-capacity, then political legitimacy must be re-grounded in the life conditions that precede all law, economy, sovereignty, and institutional authority.

## 2. The Life-Ground of Political Legitimacy

Every political theory contains an implied answer to the question: what makes political authority legitimate?

Some traditions ground legitimacy in consent. Others in divine order, tradition, sovereignty, utility, rights, law, freedom, equality, security, property, collective identity, democratic procedure, revolutionary transformation, or historical destiny. Each of these captures something important. Yet none is sufficient if detached from the life-ground.

Consent is not enough if people consent under deprivation, misinformation, coercion, or despair.

Law is not enough if law protects arrangements that destroy the conditions of life.

Security is not enough if security preserves some lives by rendering others disposable.

Freedom is not enough if freedom means only formal permission without real capacity.

Equality is not enough if equal treatment ignores unequal exposure to harm.

Growth is not enough if growth increases throughput while degrading the ecological and social basis of future life.

Rights are not enough if they remain abstract while people lack food, housing, care, education, health, ecological safety, and meaningful voice.

A life-coherent politics does not reject these political goods. It reorders them. Consent, law, rights, freedom, equality, security, and development are legitimate only insofar as they remain answerable to life-capacity. The life-ground is not one political value among others. It is the condition under which all political values become meaningful.

The life-ground includes the natural and social conditions without which living beings cannot exist, develop, or participate (McMurtry, 2011; Nussbaum, 2011). It includes air, water, food, shelter, bodily integrity, ecological stability, care, language, education, health, cultural meaning, social trust, and the institutional commons through which these are protected across time. It is biological, ecological, social, cultural, and intergenerational.

This means that politics cannot be adequately understood as the governance of individuals alone, nor as the governance of states alone, nor as the governance of markets alone. Politics governs relations among living beings and the worlds they bring forth together.

From this perspective, political legitimacy depends on at least four life-ground conditions.

First, a political order must protect the basic necessities of life. A society that denies access to water, food, shelter, care, and health cannot compensate for this failure through procedural legitimacy alone.

Second, a political order must reduce avoidable life-capacity suppression. Where people are prevented from developing, participating, or flourishing by structural arrangements, legitimacy is impaired.

Third, a political order must preserve the ecological conditions of future life. No present political community has the moral authority to consume the conditions of existence for those who come after.

Fourth, a political order must enable persons and communities to participate meaningfully in shaping the conditions that shape them. Life is not merely to be administered. Living beings are sense-making, world-participating beings.

Life-coherent politics therefore defines legitimacy as the accountable conservation and expansion of shared life-capacity under conditions of constraint (Sen, 1999; McMurry, 2011).

This shifts the central question of politics.

The question is not merely: who has authority?

The deeper question is: does this authority protect the conditions of life?

The question is not merely: was the procedure followed?

The deeper question is: did the procedure perceive and repair the harm?

The question is not merely: did the economy grow?

The deeper question is: did life-capacity grow, or was life consumed to grow the economy?

The question is not merely: are citizens formally free?

The deeper question is: do persons and communities possess real options to live, develop, belong, deliberate, and act?

Life-coherent politics begins where these deeper questions are allowed to govern the political field.



**Figure 2. The Life-Ground of Political Legitimacy.** Consent, law, rights, security, freedom, and development become politically meaningful only when rooted in the natural, social, cultural, and institutional conditions that make life-capacity possible.

To ask whether politics protects the life-ground is also to ask what kind of world political arrangements are conserving.

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### 3. Politics as World-Conservation

Politics is often imagined as decision-making. Governments decide. Parliaments legislate. Courts adjudicate. Administrations implement. Citizens vote. Parties compete. Movements mobilize. Markets allocate. These activities matter, but they do not fully disclose what politics is doing.

Politics conserves worlds.

A world is not merely a physical environment. It is a patterned field of relations in which certain ways of living become possible, normal, rewarded, punished, visible, invisible, protected, or sacrificed. Laws conserve worlds. Budgets conserve worlds. School systems conserve worlds. Policing conserves worlds. Media conserve worlds. Health systems conserve worlds. Property regimes conserve worlds. Housing policies conserve worlds. Food systems conserve worlds. Constitutions conserve worlds. Algorithms conserve worlds. Even silence conserves worlds.

The political question is therefore not only what policy achieves, but what world it stabilizes.

A punitive welfare system conserves a world in which need is suspected.

An extractive economy conserves a world in which land, labor, and life are inputs.

A militarized security order conserves a world in which threat precedes relationship.

A commons-based health system conserves a world in which care is a shared condition of freedom.

A participatory ecological democracy conserves a world in which affected communities help govern the conditions of their own viability.

A life-coherent politics makes this world-conserving function explicit. It asks: what distinctions does this political order bring forth? What does it teach people to notice? What does it reward? What does it make unsayable? What forms of suffering does it normalize? What forms of care does it protect? What futures does it foreclose? What relations does it make easier or harder to live?

This is where politics and epistemology meet. A political order is also an order of perception (Maturana, 1988). It trains a society to see some things and not others. It may see unemployment but not despair, inflation but not household exhaustion, productivity but not burnout, crime but not abandonment, school performance but not childhood stress, border security but not displacement, economic activity but not ecological depletion.

Life-coherent politics requires an expanded political perception. It must become able to see the living relations that conventional metrics obscure.

This does not mean abandoning measurement. It means refusing to allow measurement to become life-blind. Indicators must be judged by whether they help a society perceive and repair life-capacity. Economic, administrative, and security metrics must be nested within life-ground metrics: health, nourishment, ecological integrity, care time, trust, participation, belonging, educational development, housing security, meaningful work, psychological safety, cultural continuity, and future viability.

Politics as world-conservation also clarifies the stakes of polarization. Polarization is not merely disagreement. Disagreement is normal and necessary in democratic life. Polarization becomes destructive when groups no longer recognize each other as co-participants in a shared world, but as threats to be defeated, humiliated, excluded, or erased. At that point politics stops being a practice of shared world-repair and becomes a struggle over whose world will cancel the other.

Life-coherent politics does not require false consensus. It requires a deeper discipline: conflict must remain answerable to the shared life-ground. Opponents may disagree radically, but they cannot legitimately destroy the conditions of coexistence. The life-ground is the prior commons beneath pluralism (Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 2008; McMurtry, 2011).



**The first duty of politics is to conserve the possibility of life.  
*Everything else must answer to that.***

**Figure 3. Politics as World-Conservation.** Political arrangements do not merely decide policies; they conserve worlds by stabilizing particular ways of living, relating, knowing, valuing, producing, belonging, excluding, and imagining.

Once politics is understood as world-conservation, violence must be understood not only as episodic injury, but as any patterned world that suppresses the capacity of life to continue, develop, belong, and participate.

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## 4. Violence as Life-Capacity Suppression

A life-coherent politics requires an expanded understanding of violence.

Direct violence is visible when bodies are injured, killed, displaced, imprisoned, or terrorized. It is the most immediately recognizable form of political harm. Yet direct violence is only one layer. Political systems may suppress life-capacity without direct physical attack. They may do so through institutional arrangements that predictably produce deprivation, exclusion, humiliation, sickness, ecological damage, and shortened lives.

Structural violence occurs when harm is built into the ordinary functioning of social systems (Galtung, 1969). People may be denied access to the conditions of life not because one identifiable actor assaults them, but because housing, labor, education, health, finance, policing, infrastructure, and environmental systems distribute exposure, opportunity, and vulnerability unequally. Structural violence is often normalized because no single act appears violent in isolation. The violence lies in the patterned result.

Cultural violence occurs when symbols, ideologies, narratives, identities, or knowledge systems legitimize direct or structural harm (Galtung, 1990). A society may come to see poverty as personal failure, ecological destruction as development, domination as order, cruelty as discipline, exclusion as security, and sacrifice zones as necessary costs. Cultural violence makes life-capacity suppression appear reasonable.

Life-coherent politics interprets violence as any avoidable pattern that suppresses the capacity of living beings to meet necessities, develop powers, participate meaningfully, and remain in viable relation with others and the life-ground.

This definition does not erase differences among kinds of violence. It clarifies their shared effect. Direct violence wounds life. Structural violence organizes life-deprivation. Cultural violence justifies the wound and the deprivation. Ecological violence degrades the natural conditions of life. Epistemic violence disables the capacity to know, name, and contest harm. Administrative violence turns procedure into a mechanism of abandonment. Economic violence forces life to serve accumulation rather than the other way around.

The political task is therefore not merely to prevent overt conflict. It is to identify and transform the patterned suppression of life-capacity.

A life-coherent political order must ask:

Where are people being prevented from meeting life necessities?

Where are communities losing control over the conditions that shape them?

Where are ecological systems being degraded beyond repair?

Where are institutions producing despair while appearing procedurally correct?

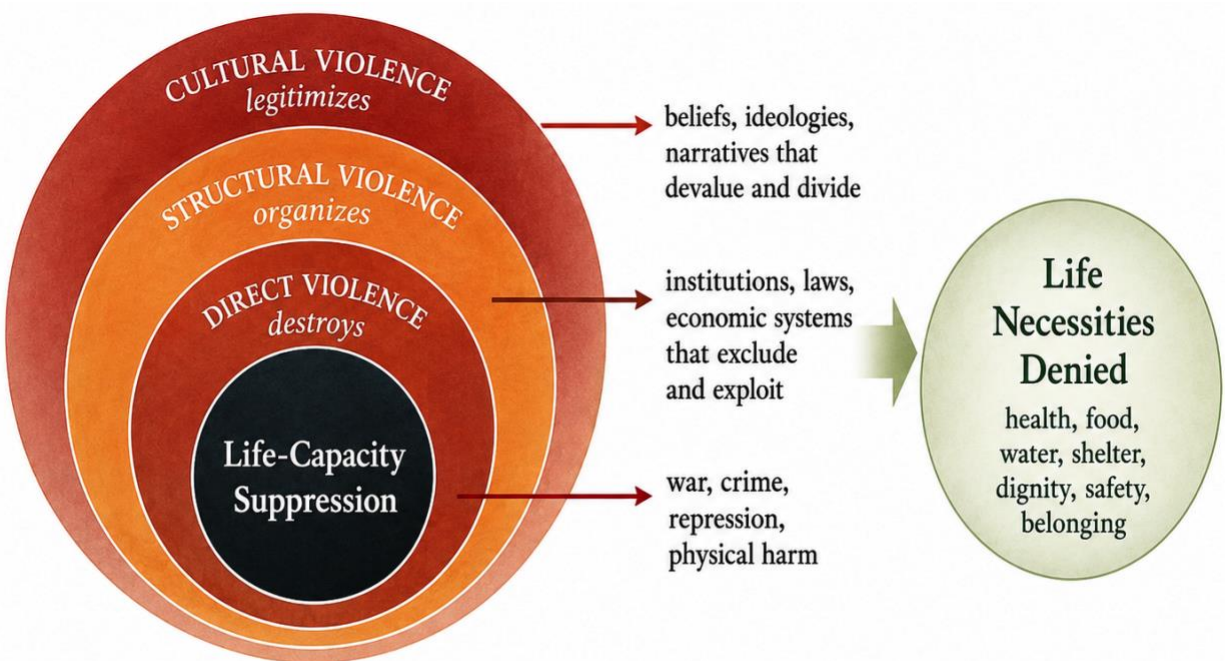
Where are dominant narratives legitimizing avoidable harm?

Where is the burden of adjustment being placed on those with the least margin?

Where are future generations being silently dispossessed?

These questions turn violence from a narrow security issue into a field diagnostic. They reveal that peace is not merely the absence of war or disorder. Peace is the presence of conditions in which life-capacity can be secured and developed without domination (Galtung, 1969, 1990).

Life-coherent politics therefore aligns with positive peace: not only non-killing, but the active organization of social, ecological, economic, and cultural conditions that allow life to flourish.



All violence, in its forms, reduces life-capacity. Peace is the creation of life-supporting conditions.

**Figure 4. Violence as Life-Capacity Suppression.** Violence is not limited to direct bodily harm. Political orders also suppress life-capacity through structures, meanings, ecological degradation, administrative barriers, economic coercion, and distorted knowledge systems.

If violence is life-capacity suppression, then peace requires more than the absence of attack; it requires the regeneration of the shared systems that make non-dominated life possible.

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## Part II. The Civil Commons and Democratic Coexistence

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### 5. The Civil Commons as Political Infrastructure

If politics is the governance of shared life-capacity, then the civil commons is not a peripheral social good. It is political infrastructure.

The civil commons refers to those shared institutions, practices, resources, relationships, and systems through which life-capacity is protected and expanded without being subordinated to private profit, arbitrary domination, or exclusionary privilege. It includes health care, education, clean water, sanitation, public health, ecological protection, emergency preparedness, food security, libraries, knowledge systems, public trust, democratic participation, social care, cultural memory, and the legal-institutional arrangements that secure these across time.

In conventional political economy, such systems are often treated as “public services,” “social spending,” “welfare,” “externalities,” or “infrastructure costs.” A life-coherent politics sees them differently. They are the conditions under which freedom, dignity, development, and participation become real. Without them, political rights become formal but hollow. One may possess the legal right to speak while lacking education, health, security, time, or social standing to be heard. One may possess market choice while lacking viable options. One may be counted as a citizen while being structurally excluded from the worlds in which decisions are made.

The civil commons is therefore the living infrastructure of political legitimacy (McMurtry, 2011).

This reframing matters because modern politics often misclassifies the civil commons as a cost, while treating extractive or growth-oriented sectors as wealth-producing. Yet the opposite may be true at the level of life-capacity. A health system that prevents disease, an education system that develops judgment, a watershed protected from contamination, a trustworthy public-service culture, a resilient food system, a functioning emergency-response network, and a democratic public sphere may produce less immediately visible monetary accumulation than extractive industries or speculative finance, but they conserve the conditions under which persons and societies can continue to live.

A life-coherent politics therefore asks not simply how much the state spends, but whether collective provisioning expands or degrades shared life-capacity. The question is not whether an institution is public or private in the abstract, but whether it is life-serving, accountable, participatory, ecologically bounded, and protected from predatory capture. State systems can become bureaucratic, coercive, exclusionary, or life-blind. Market systems can generate innovation and coordination while also enclosing necessities, externalizing harm, and converting dependency into profit. Community systems can sustain care and belonging while also reproducing exclusion, hierarchy, or silence. The life-coherent question is functional and ethical:

does this arrangement protect and expand life-capacity, or does it consume life-capacity while calling itself efficient, traditional, profitable, or necessary?

Elinor Ostrom's work on commons governance is important here because it disrupts the false binary between centralized state command and privatized market control. Commons are not automatically doomed to tragedy (Ostrom, 1990). Under appropriate conditions, communities can govern shared resources through clearly defined boundaries, locally adapted rules, monitoring, graduated sanctions, accessible conflict-resolution mechanisms, recognition of self-organization, and nested governance arrangements (Ostrom, 1990). This does not mean that all commons are small, simple, or self-managing without institutional support. It means that viable governance must be relationally fitted to the resource, the community, the scale of use, and the patterns of accountability.

Life-coherent politics extends this insight from natural-resource commons to the wider civil commons. Water, health, education, care, knowledge, ecological stability, democratic trust, and public meaning are not merely commodities or administrative sectors. They are shared life-support systems. Their degradation harms not only individual consumers, but the field of life in which all political agency occurs.

This also changes the meaning of political repair. Repair is not only compensation after damage. It is the rebuilding of commons capacities: the restoration of trust after betrayal, soil after extraction, water after contamination, care after abandonment, public meaning after propaganda, institutions after corruption, and participation after exclusion. A politics that cannot repair its commons cannot remain coherent, no matter how frequently it holds elections or how efficiently it administers decline.

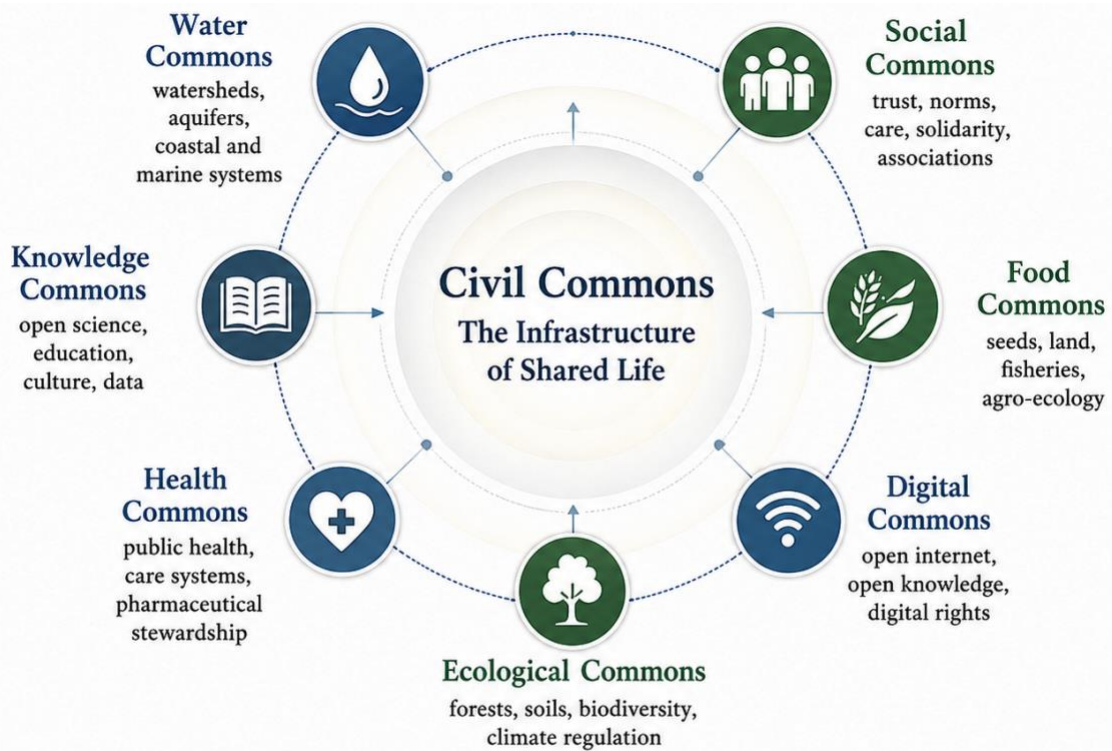
The civil commons also clarifies why austerity can become a form of structural violence. When budgetary discipline protects financial indicators by degrading health, education, housing, food security, ecological protection, or care work, it transfers systemic strain onto bodies, families, communities, and future generations. The harm may not appear as direct violence, but life-capacity is suppressed. A life-coherent politics does not deny fiscal constraint. It asks what is being protected and what is being sacrificed when fiscal discipline is invoked.

The civil commons is not a utopian supplement to politics. It is the condition of non-dominated life. It makes freedom substantive, democracy participatory, peace positive, development human, and security life-serving.

A society's political maturity can therefore be measured by the condition of its civil commons.

Where the civil commons is strong, persons have greater real capacity to live, learn, deliberate, cooperate, heal, dissent, and participate. Where it is weak, political life becomes anxious, extractive, distrustful, polarized, and easily captured by fear or resentment. Where it is enclosed, necessities become revenue streams. Where it is abandoned, private coping replaces public care. Where it is corrupted, cynicism becomes rational. Where it is regenerated, political possibility reopens.

The civil commons is the vessel of life-coherent politics.



Commons are not leftovers of the past; they are the foundations of the future.

**Figure 5. The Civil Commons as Political Infrastructure.** The civil commons consists of shared life-support systems through which persons and communities access the conditions of health, learning, care, ecological stability, public knowledge, democratic participation, and non-dominated life.

Yet the civil commons cannot be governed only for people; it must be governed with them, through democratic forms of coexistence that allow affected life to enter the decision field.

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## 6. Democracy as Relational Coexistence

Democracy is often defined procedurally: elections, representation, majority rule, constitutional limits, civil liberties, separation of powers, legal accountability, and peaceful transitions of authority. These are indispensable. Without them, democracy becomes vulnerable to authoritarian capture, arbitrary power, and institutional decay. Yet procedure alone does not exhaust the meaning of democracy.

At a deeper level, democracy is a form of coexistence (Maturana, 1988; Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 2008).

A democratic society is not merely a population that periodically votes. It is a relational field in which persons recognize one another as legitimate co-participants in shaping a shared world. This does not require agreement. Democracy depends on disagreement. It requires that disagreement remain within a horizon of mutual legitimacy, where opponents are not converted into enemies whose exclusion, humiliation, or destruction becomes the goal of political action.

Here Maturana's insight into the "legitimate other in coexistence" is politically decisive (Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 2008). Social life depends on relational domains in which the other is not denied as a valid participant in the shared field. Love, in this biological-relational sense, is not sentimentality. It is the condition under which coexistence becomes possible. Aggression, by contrast, denies the other as a legitimate other. A life-coherent democracy must therefore protect not only procedures of representation, but the relational conditions that allow people to remain co-inhabitants of a shared world.

This does not mean that all positions are equally valid or that democracy must tolerate domination in the name of openness. Life-coherent democracy cannot grant equal legitimacy to arrangements that destroy the conditions of legitimacy itself. Racism, ecological destruction, organized cruelty, corruption, authoritarianism, and direct incitement to violence cannot be treated as ordinary pluralism. The recognition of the other as legitimate does not mean the recognition of every action, ideology, or institution as life-coherent.

The distinction is crucial. Persons remain within the domain of possible coexistence. Harmful patterns must be named, constrained, and transformed. Democracy fails both when it dehumanizes persons and when it refuses to confront life-destroying patterns.

Life-coherent democracy therefore requires a double discipline: relational recognition and life-ground accountability. It must preserve the dignity and participation of persons while refusing to normalize systems of domination, abandonment, or ecological destruction.

This reframes polarization. Polarization is not merely strong disagreement. Strong disagreement can be healthy where it clarifies values, exposes harm, and enables correction. Polarization becomes life-destructive when political identity overrides shared reality, when opponents become existential threats, when humiliation replaces deliberation, when public meaning

fragments into mutually hostile worlds, and when institutions profit from outrage rather than repair.

The life-coherent response to polarization is not shallow civility. Civility can become a mask for avoiding structural harm. Nor is the answer permanent combat. Combat can become addictive, self-justifying, and incapable of rebuilding the field. The task is participatory repair: the creation of spaces, institutions, media practices, educational forms, and local governance processes that allow people to re-enter shared reality without denying real wounds.

Democracy as relational coexistence has several requirements.

First, people must have real access to the conditions of participation. Formal voting rights are insufficient where poverty, fear, illness, illiteracy, social exclusion, digital manipulation, or administrative barriers prevent meaningful participation.

Second, democratic institutions must be able to hear harm before it becomes crisis. This requires public-health surveillance, environmental monitoring, social listening, participatory budgeting, local deliberative assemblies, ombuds systems, investigative journalism, independent courts, community-based organizations, and protected spaces for dissent.

Third, democracy requires epistemic commons. Citizens cannot deliberate coherently when shared reality is destroyed. Knowledge systems, journalism, education, science, libraries, public data, and cultural memory are therefore democratic infrastructure. Disinformation is not only a communication problem; it is an attack on the field of shared perception.

Fourth, democracy requires time. A society operating under constant precarity, outrage, crisis, exhaustion, and acceleration loses the temporal margin needed for judgment. Democracy cannot thrive where attention is continuously harvested, fear is continuously amplified, and survival stress consumes the capacity to participate.

Fifth, democracy requires repair after conflict. Elections decide authority, but they do not automatically repair damaged relations. A life-coherent democracy must develop institutions for truth-telling, reconciliation, restitution, conflict transformation, and community healing.

Democracy, then, is not only a mechanism for choosing rulers. It is a living practice of shared world-conservation under conditions of difference.

A life-coherent democracy asks: can those affected by a decision participate meaningfully in shaping it? Can harm be named without retaliation? Can minorities resist domination? Can future generations be represented? Can ecological realities enter the decision field? Can institutions correct themselves? Can opponents remain co-participants rather than enemies? Can truth survive political advantage? Can the system repair what it damages?

Where the answer is no, democratic form may remain, but democratic life is weakening.

Where the answer is yes, politics becomes more than competition. It becomes collective self-correction in service of shared life.

For democratic coexistence to be real rather than merely procedural, persons and communities must possess the capabilities and necessities required to participate meaningfully in the worlds that shape them.

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## 7. Capabilities, Necessities, and Real Participation

A life-coherent politics cannot be satisfied with formal freedom alone. It must ask whether persons and communities possess real capacity to live the kinds of lives they have reason to value, while remaining answerable to the life-ground that makes such lives possible.

The capabilities approach, associated especially with Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, provides an important bridge between political freedom and lived possibility (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). It shifts attention from resources or utility alone to what people are actually able to be and do. A person may have formal rights, legal equality, or access to markets while lacking the substantive conditions required for health, education, mobility, bodily integrity, political voice, social respect, and practical agency. The issue is not only what people possess, but what they are really able to become and enact.

Life-coherent politics shares this concern, but places it within a broader life-ground frame.

Capabilities require necessities (McMurtry, 2011; Nussbaum, 2011). One cannot develop capacities without air, water, nutrition, shelter, bodily security, care, education, health, language, social belonging, and ecological continuity. Necessities are not merely consumption items. They are enabling conditions of life-capacity. They are the ground from which capabilities emerge.

This means that political freedom must be understood as layered.

At the first layer is biological viability: the conditions required for bodily life.

At the second layer is developmental viability: the conditions required for learning, emotional growth, health, identity formation, and meaningful relationship.

At the third layer is social viability: the conditions required for belonging, dignity, recognition, cooperation, and protection from domination.

At the fourth layer is political viability: the conditions required for voice, participation, dissent, accountability, and shared decision-making.

At the fifth layer is ecological viability: the conditions required for present and future life to remain within the regenerative capacities of Earth systems.

A society that protects political speech while destroying ecological conditions is not life-coherent. A society that expands consumer choice while undermining nutrition, housing, care, and mental health is not life-coherent. A society that celebrates individual aspiration while exhausting the relational conditions of childhood development is not life-coherent. A society that grants formal equality while leaving some communities exposed to polluted air, unsafe water, violence, or institutional neglect is not life-coherent.

Real participation depends on the integration of necessities and capabilities.

This is why life-coherent politics cannot separate social policy from democratic policy. A hungry person is formally free but materially constrained. A sick person without care is formally equal but functionally abandoned. A child without education is formally a future citizen but practically deprived of political development. A community without clean water is formally represented but life-ground insecure. A worker without time, security, or dignity is formally enfranchised but participatorily weakened.

Participation is not only the right to enter the political arena. It is the cultivated capacity to perceive, deliberate, speak, organize, dissent, cooperate, imagine, and act.

This is also why education is central to life-coherent politics. Education is not merely workforce preparation. It is the formation of persons capable of world-participation. A life-coherent education system develops literacy, numeracy, historical understanding, ecological awareness, ethical judgment, emotional maturity, civic agency, scientific reasoning, cultural imagination, and the ability to listen across difference. It prepares people not only to compete in markets, but to participate in conserving and repairing shared worlds.

Likewise, health is not merely the absence of disease or the provision of clinical services. Health is the embodied capacity for life-participation. Public health, primary care, mental health, nutrition, maternal and child health, elder care, disability inclusion, and environmental health are therefore political conditions. They determine whether people can participate in the worlds that claim their consent.

A life-coherent politics also recognizes that participation must include those who are routinely rendered silent: children, future generations, ecosystems, the disabled, the poor, migrants, Indigenous communities, racialized groups, caregivers, informal workers, nonhuman life, and communities exposed to slow violence. Not all can participate in identical ways, but all can be represented within the field of political accountability. To ignore them is to create sacrifice zones within the political imagination.

The concept of real participation also guards against technocracy. Expert knowledge is indispensable in complex societies, but expertise cannot replace the situated knowledge of those living within affected conditions. A coastal community knows forms of ecological change that satellite data may miss. Patients know forms of suffering that administrative data may flatten. Caregivers know forms of labor that budgets often erase. Workers know operational realities that management metrics may obscure. Youth know futures that current institutions discount.

Life-coherent politics must therefore combine scientific evidence, professional expertise, local knowledge, lived experience, and intergenerational responsibility. It must avoid both anti-expert populism and expert-driven domination. The aim is not to choose between expertise and participation, but to create institutions in which knowledge becomes answerable to life.

The life-coherent test of participation is therefore not simply whether people were consulted. It is whether affected beings and communities had meaningful influence over the conditions shaping

their lives, whether their knowledge altered the decision field, and whether the resulting arrangement expanded rather than suppressed life-capacity.

Real participation is life-capacity becoming politically articulate.

But the expansion of human capability becomes life-incoherent if it is achieved by degrading the ecological conditions on which present and future capabilities depend.

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## 8. Ecological Limits and the Safe-and-Just Political Space

Politics cannot be life-coherent if it treats ecological limits as external constraints on an otherwise autonomous human project. Human societies are not outside the biosphere. They are living systems within living systems. Every economy, institution, technology, city, state, and culture depends on Earth-system conditions it did not create and cannot replace.

A life-coherent politics therefore begins from ecological embeddedness.

The planetary boundaries framework identifies critical Earth-system processes whose destabilization threatens the safe operating space for humanity (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015; Richardson et al., 2023). These include climate change, biosphere integrity, land-system change, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows, ocean acidification, atmospheric aerosol loading, novel entities, and stratospheric ozone depletion. Recent assessments indicate that multiple planetary boundaries have already been transgressed. The political significance is profound: ecological breakdown is not one policy issue among others. It is a destabilization of the life-ground.

The Doughnut framework expresses this in social and ecological terms. Below the social foundation, people fall into deprivation. Beyond the ecological ceiling, societies overshoot Earth's regenerative and absorptive capacities. Between these boundaries lies a safe and just space for humanity (Raworth, 2012, 2017). This model is especially useful for life-coherent politics because it refuses the false choice between social justice and ecological responsibility. A society must meet human needs without destroying the ecological systems that make need-satisfaction possible.

Life-coherent politics extends this insight by asking how political institutions can remain accountable to both the inner social foundation and the outer ecological ceiling.

A politics that emphasizes ecological limits while ignoring poverty, colonial histories, inequality, and unequal exposure to harm can become punitive, exclusionary, or eco-authoritarian. A politics that emphasizes social development while ignoring ecological limits can become extractive, growth-dependent, and intergenerationally unjust. Life-coherent politics must hold both together: no one should be pushed below the social foundation, and no society should be permitted to destroy the ecological ceiling.

This creates a new understanding of political responsibility.

First, ecological stability is a condition of justice. Climate disruption, biodiversity loss, freshwater depletion, soil degradation, and pollution do not affect all people equally. They intensify existing inequalities and expose those with the least margin to the greatest harm. Environmental policy is therefore not separate from social policy. It is life-ground policy.

Second, future generations are political stakeholders. They cannot vote, lobby, litigate, or bargain in present institutions, yet they inherit the consequences of present decisions. A life-coherent politics must therefore build institutional mechanisms for intergenerational accountability: long-term impact assessment, ecological constitutionalism, guardianship models, youth councils, future-generation commissioners, precautionary regulation, and public accounting of irreversible harms.

Third, nonhuman life must enter political consideration. This does not require collapsing all distinctions between human and nonhuman beings. It requires recognizing that human life-capacity depends on the integrity of wider living systems and that nonhuman beings are not merely resources. Forests, coral reefs, rivers, soils, pollinators, fisheries, microbial systems, and climate-regulating ecosystems are participants in the web of life, even if they do not participate discursively in human institutions.

Fourth, development must be redefined. Development cannot mean the expansion of economic throughput regardless of ecological consequence. It must mean the expansion of life-capacity within regenerative limits. This requires shifting from extractive growth to sufficiency, resilience, circularity, repair, care, restoration, and commons-based provisioning.

Fifth, political economy must distinguish between life-serving and life-consuming activity. Some activities increase monetary output while degrading life-capacity. Others may produce less measured growth while regenerating health, trust, ecological stability, learning, care, and resilience. Life-coherent politics must make these distinctions visible in budgets, indicators, planning systems, and democratic deliberation.

Ecological limits also change the meaning of freedom. Freedom cannot mean unlimited consumption by some at the expense of the life-ground of all. Nor can it mean liberation from dependency on nature. Freedom is the cultivated capacity to live well within relations that sustain life. A society is freer when its people can meet their needs securely, participate meaningfully, enjoy beauty and belonging, and trust that their children will inherit a viable world.

This understanding is especially important for small island developing states, coastal communities, Indigenous peoples, and climate-vulnerable regions. For such communities, ecological limits are not abstract global thresholds. They are lived through storms, sea-level rise, reef decline, water insecurity, food import dependence, heat stress, coastal erosion, insurance retreat, tourism vulnerability, and migration pressures. Life-coherent politics must therefore be place-attentive. It must understand that global ecological destabilization is experienced locally through specific histories, livelihoods, infrastructures, cultures, and vulnerabilities.

The safe-and-just political space is thus not merely a diagram. It is a governance mandate.

Every political decision should be tested against two boundary questions:

Does this decision push any person or community below the social foundation of life necessities and capabilities?

Does this decision push the society, region, or planet beyond ecological limits that future life requires?

Where either answer is yes, the decision is politically incoherent, no matter how profitable, popular, legal, or efficient it may appear.

A life-coherent politics must therefore become capable of ecological self-limitation without social abandonment, and social provisioning without ecological overshoot (Raworth, 2017; Richardson et al., 2023).

That is the narrow path of political maturity in the twenty-first century.

The challenge is therefore practical: politics needs a diagnostic grammar capable of holding necessities, participation, violence, commons, margins, options, and ecological boundaries together in one field of judgment.

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## Part III. The Diagnostic Grammar of Life-Coherent Politics

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### 9. The Sevenfold Diagnostic Grammar of Life-Coherent Politics

Life-coherent politics requires more than a moral aspiration. It requires a diagnostic grammar: a way of seeing political conditions, locating incoherence, identifying repair pathways, and distinguishing life-serving action from system-preserving harm (McMurtry, 2011; Ostrom, 1990).

This grammar can be organized around seven functional dimensions: **constraint, margin, state, disturbance, perception, regulation, and options**. These dimensions do not replace existing political categories such as rights, duties, institutions, representation, law, economy, and sovereignty. They re-situate those categories within a living field. They ask how political arrangements affect the viability of persons, communities, ecosystems, institutions, and future generations.

The first dimension is **constraint**.

Every political order operates under constraint. Ecological limits, geography, history, budgets, institutions, law, trauma, infrastructure, culture, demographic patterns, technological systems, and inherited inequalities all shape what is possible. Life-coherent politics does not pretend that societies can do anything they wish. It begins with sober attention to real limits.

But constraint must be interpreted carefully. Some constraints are life-serving and must be honored. Ecological limits are constraints. Bodily needs are constraints. The developmental requirements of children are constraints. The absorptive capacities of communities are constraints. The time needed for trust, healing, deliberation, and institutional learning is a constraint. These are not obstacles to politics. They are the conditions of viable politics.

Other constraints are historically produced and must be transformed. Poverty, racism, colonial dependency, debt traps, gender domination, corruption, bureaucratic cruelty, exclusionary property systems, disinformation, and predatory economic arrangements may appear as constraints, but they are not natural inevitabilities. They are conserved patterns. A life-coherent politics must distinguish constraints that protect life from constraints that suppress life.

The second dimension is **margin**.

A system without margin becomes brittle. In living systems, margin appears as reserve, redundancy, diversity, trust, time, health, ecological buffer, emotional capacity, fiscal space, institutional legitimacy, and social solidarity. Margin allows systems to absorb disturbance without collapse. It allows people to recover from illness, families to endure hardship,

ecosystems to regenerate, institutions to correct errors, and democracies to deliberate rather than panic.

Life-blind politics often consumes margin in the name of efficiency. Just-in-time supply chains reduce buffer. Austerity reduces social protection. Overwork reduces bodily and emotional reserves. Ecological extraction reduces regenerative capacity. Polarization reduces trust. Administrative overload reduces institutional responsiveness. Digital acceleration reduces attention. Debt dependence reduces policy freedom. When margin is consumed, societies may appear efficient until disturbance arrives. Then the hidden fragility becomes visible.

Life-coherent politics therefore treats margin as a political good. It asks whether policies increase or decrease the reserves required for future life. It recognizes that redundancy, rest, care, ecological protection, public health, and institutional trust are not waste. They are the hidden architecture of resilience.

The third dimension is **state**.

State refers to the present condition of the living field. What is the current condition of bodies, households, communities, ecosystems, institutions, and shared meaning? What is the distribution of health, security, trust, education, housing, nourishment, ecological exposure, political voice, and future possibility? What patterns are stable? What patterns are deteriorating? Who is flourishing? Who is surviving? Who is disappearing from the field of concern?

Conventional politics often narrows the state of society to economic indicators, crime statistics, electoral preferences, fiscal balances, or administrative performance. These are not irrelevant, but they are incomplete. A life-coherent politics requires a richer state-reading: a life-capacity profile of the polity. It must be able to perceive whether children are developing well, whether caregivers are exhausted, whether soils and watersheds are degraded, whether citizens trust institutions, whether communities have time to participate, whether public discourse remains connected to reality, whether housing supports family life, whether work supports dignity, whether ecological systems remain within regenerative limits, and whether future generations are being protected or silently burdened.

The fourth dimension is **disturbance**.

Disturbance is any event or pattern that perturbs the living field. It may appear as a hurricane, pandemic, war, drought, price shock, migration surge, financial crisis, political scandal, technological disruption, public-health emergency, social movement, ecological tipping point, or institutional failure. Disturbance can be destructive, but it can also reveal hidden truths. It exposes weak margins, false assumptions, brittle institutions, unacknowledged dependencies, and suppressed harms.

A life-coherent politics does not merely suppress disturbance. It learns from it. It asks what the disturbance reveals about the system. Why did this shock produce such unequal harm? Why was the institution unable to respond? Why did trust collapse? Why did some communities recover

while others did not? What invisible labor became visible? What forms of dependency were denied? What margins had already been consumed before the crisis arrived?

Disturbance is politically instructive when it is allowed to disclose the structure of the field.

The fifth dimension is **perception**.

Political systems act according to what they can perceive. If a society cannot perceive structural violence, it will individualize suffering. If it cannot perceive ecological degradation, it will mistake extraction for growth. If it cannot perceive care work, it will treat social reproduction as costless. If it cannot perceive trauma, it will punish symptoms. If it cannot perceive misinformation as field damage, it will treat shared reality as optional. If it cannot perceive future generations, it will discount them.

Perception is therefore political infrastructure. Statistics, journalism, science, education, local knowledge, public hearings, community testimony, historical memory, whistleblower protections, independent courts, monitoring systems, ecological indicators, health surveillance, and civic dialogue all shape what a polity can see. A life-coherent politics requires perception systems that are capable of detecting life-capacity suppression early, before harm becomes crisis.

But perception is not only technical. It is also moral and relational. A society may have data and still refuse to see. It may know that people are hungry, displaced, polluted, excluded, or exhausted, yet organize meaning so that these harms appear normal. Life-coherent perception requires the willingness to be affected by reality. It requires a political culture in which suffering can become visible without being converted immediately into blame, denial, spectacle, or partisan advantage.

The sixth dimension is **regulation**.

Regulation refers to the feedback processes through which a society corrects itself. Laws regulate. Budgets regulate. Elections regulate. Courts regulate. Markets regulate. Public-health systems regulate. Civil society regulates. Journalism regulates. Professional ethics regulate. Community norms regulate. Ecological limits regulate. Protest regulates. Memory regulates. Grief can regulate. Shame can regulate. Hope can regulate.

A life-coherent political order requires feedback loops that detect harm, interpret it truthfully, and generate corrective action. Without such loops, systems drift toward incoherence. Institutions become self-protective. Elites become insulated. Metrics become performative. Citizens become cynical. Ecological warnings are ignored. Harm accumulates until correction requires crisis.

Regulation must also be non-dominating. Not all correction is life-coherent. Punitive systems may suppress symptoms while deepening causes. Technocratic systems may impose solutions without participation. Markets may correct prices while ignoring life damage. Security systems may restore order while destroying trust. Moralistic systems may shame individuals while

preserving harmful structures. Life-coherent regulation asks whether correction restores the field or merely forces compliance.

The seventh dimension is **options**.

Options are the real pathways available to living beings under constraint. A person may appear free because no law forbids action, yet lack real options because of poverty, fear, illness, debt, exclusion, lack of transport, lack of childcare, lack of information, ecological degradation, or social domination. A community may appear autonomous while having no viable economic, ecological, or institutional pathway. A nation may appear sovereign while trapped by debt, dependency, climate vulnerability, geopolitical pressure, or trade arrangements.

Life-coherent politics measures freedom by real options, not merely formal permission. Real options include the ability to meet needs, refuse exploitation, participate in decisions, access care, learn, move safely, remain rooted when desired, dissent without terror, repair damaged relationships, recover from shock, and imagine futures beyond survival.

The expansion of options must also be life-bounded. An option is not life-coherent simply because someone can choose it. Options that depend on destroying ecological systems, exploiting others, externalizing harm, or consuming the future are not true expansions of freedom. They are displacements of cost. Life-coherent options expand agency while preserving the life-ground.

Together, these seven dimensions form a political diagnostic.

A life-coherent policy or institution should be able to answer:

What constraints does it recognize, and which constraints does it challenge?

What margins does it preserve or consume?

What state of life does it reveal or conceal?

What disturbances does it prepare for, learn from, or intensify?

What does it enable society to perceive?

What feedback and correction does it make possible?

What real options does it expand, for whom, and at whose cost?

This grammar helps distinguish genuine repair from life-blind system maintenance. It also prevents politics from collapsing into slogans. A policy may sound compassionate while consuming margin. It may sound efficient while concealing damage. It may sound secure while reducing options. It may sound democratic while excluding affected communities. It may sound realistic while conserving avoidable harm.

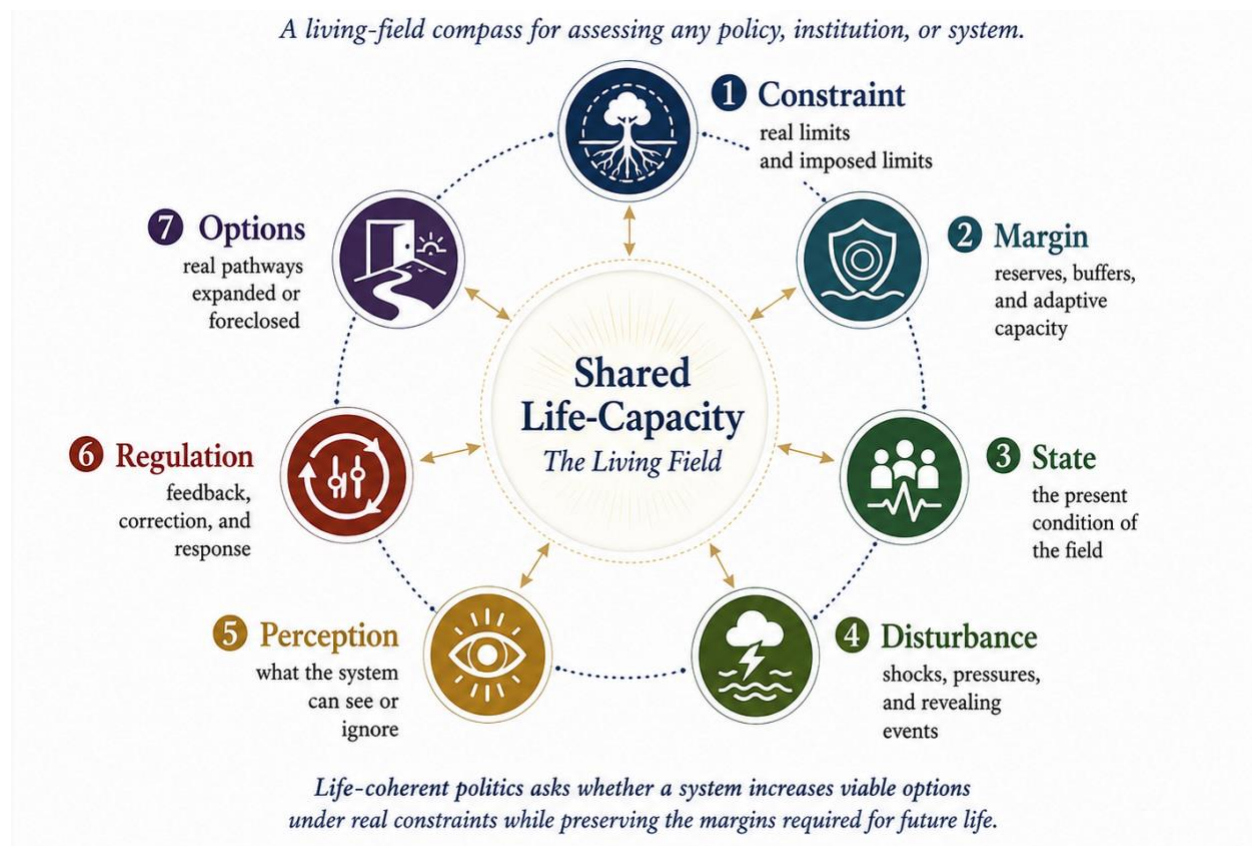
Life-coherent politics therefore requires disciplined questioning. Not every good intention is life-coherent. Not every reform repairs. Not every participation process gives voice. Not every innovation expands options. Not every stabilizing measure preserves life. The sevenfold grammar provides a way of testing political action against the living field it affects.

At its most concise, the grammar asks:

Does this political arrangement increase viable options under real constraints while preserving the margins required for future life?

If it does, it tends toward life-coherence.

If it does not, it may be politically active while remaining life-blind.



**Figure 6. The Sevenfold Diagnostic Grammar.** Life-coherent politics evaluates political arrangements through seven functional dimensions: constraint, margin, state, disturbance, perception, regulation, and options. Together they reveal whether a system expands viable life-capacity or merely preserves itself.

When this grammar is applied to contemporary political systems, one recurring pathology appears with particular force: systems that should serve life often demand sacrifice from life in order to preserve themselves.

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## 10. The Great Inversion: When Systems Demand Sacrifice from Life

The central pathology of modern politics is not simply that systems fail (McMurtry, 1998, 2013). Systems always fail in some way. Institutions are finite, knowledge is incomplete, and political judgment occurs under uncertainty. The deeper pathology is that systems increasingly demand sacrifice from life in order to preserve themselves, and then name this sacrifice necessity.

This is the great inversion.

In a life-coherent order, systems exist to serve life. Economies provision life. Laws protect life. States coordinate life-serving goods. Markets assist exchange within life limits. Technologies extend human and ecological capacity. Education develops persons. Health systems sustain embodied participation. Security protects conditions of peace. Knowledge helps societies perceive and repair reality. Political authority remains answerable to the life-ground.

In the inverted order, life is required to serve systems. Persons serve the economy. Communities serve development plans. Ecosystems serve extraction. Education serves labor-market sorting. Health serves productivity. Law serves property concentration. Technology serves attention capture. Security serves control. Knowledge serves institutional or commercial power. Politics serves system continuity.

The inversion becomes dangerous because it often appears normal.

A society may say that people must accept precarious work because the economy requires flexibility.

It may say that communities must lose land because development requires investment.

It may say that ecosystems must be degraded because growth requires sacrifice.

It may say that patients must navigate fragmented care because efficiency requires cost control.

It may say that families must absorb stress because public budgets are constrained.

It may say that children must adapt to standardized testing because systems require measurement.

It may say that citizens must accept surveillance because security requires it.

It may say that future generations must bear ecological debt because present growth cannot slow.

In each case, the system presents its own requirements as prior to the requirements of life. The living are asked to adjust to arrangements that may be producing the harm.

Life-coherent politics exposes this inversion by asking a simple question: what is being preserved, and at whose life-cost?

The great inversion is visible wherever means become ends. Money is a means of provisioning, but becomes an end before which life must bow. Law is a means of justice, but becomes an end when procedure overrides repair. Markets are means of coordination, but become ends when all necessities are commodified. States are means of collective self-governance, but become ends when authority protects itself from accountability. Technology is a means of extending capacity, but becomes an end when human attention, labor, and relationship are reorganized around machine optimization. Security is a means of protecting peace, but becomes an end when fear justifies permanent domination.

The inversion is also visible wherever harm is displaced onto those with the least power to refuse it. Poor communities absorb pollution. Caregivers absorb institutional failure. Children absorb adult instability. Migrants absorb border anxieties. Workers absorb economic volatility. Patients absorb fragmented systems. Future generations absorb ecological overshoot. Nonhuman life absorbs human extraction. The system remains coherent only by making others incoherent.

This is why sacrifice zones are politically revealing. A sacrifice zone is not only a damaged place. It is a moral technology. It allows the wider system to continue by concentrating harm elsewhere. The polluted neighborhood, the exhausted caregiver, the underfunded school, the abandoned rural district, the displaced coastal community, the overburdened clinic, the precarious worker, and the degraded reef all disclose a political order that has decided, explicitly or implicitly, where life may be spent.

Life-coherent politics refuses sacrifice-zone realism.

This refusal does not mean that no losses ever occur. It does not deny tragic choice, scarcity, or hard trade-offs. Rather, it denies the normalization of avoidable life-destruction as the permanent operating principle of political order. It asks whether sacrifices are truly unavoidable, whether burdens are fairly distributed, whether those affected participate in the decision, whether repair is built in, whether alternatives were explored, whether future harms are honestly counted, and whether the system demanding sacrifice has itself been placed under scrutiny.

The great inversion also operates at the level of language. Words such as reform, efficiency, resilience, security, modernization, development, innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability can be used in life-serving ways. But they can also conceal life-damage. Efficiency may mean fewer margins. Resilience may mean asking the vulnerable to endure more harm. Reform may mean privatization of necessities. Security may mean expanded coercion. Development may mean ecological enclosure. Innovation may mean accelerated extraction. Sustainability may mean sustaining the system, not sustaining life.

A life-coherent politics must therefore practice linguistic vigilance. It must ask what political words are doing. Do they reveal life relations or obscure them? Do they name harm or neutralize it? Do they open repair or close it? Do they invite participation or demand compliance? Do they protect the vulnerable or discipline them?

The great inversion is sustained by misrecognition. People are taught to see the economy as real and care as sentimental. They are taught to see financial debt as binding and ecological debt as abstract. They are taught to see private accumulation as achievement and commons provisioning as dependency. They are taught to see poverty as individual failure and wealth concentration as competence. They are taught to see domination as order and repair as weakness. They are taught to see the exhaustion of life as the cost of progress.

Life-coherent politics reverses this perception.

Care is not sentimental. It is infrastructural.

Ecology is not external. It is foundational.

The commons is not residual. It is life-support.

Participation is not procedural ornament. It is the means by which reality enters governance.

Margins are not inefficiencies. They are the reserves of viability.

Repair is not weakness. It is the intelligence of living systems.

Power is not legitimate because it can command. Power is legitimate only when it serves life.

The great inversion is therefore not merely an error in policy. It is a civilizational misordering of value. It places abstractions above the living processes that make abstraction possible. It asks bodies, communities, ecosystems, and futures to serve institutional forms that should have remained accountable to them.

The task of life-coherent politics is to reverse this inversion wherever it appears.

The economy must be returned to provisioning.

The state must be returned to public care and accountable coordination.

Law must be returned to justice and repair.

Security must be returned to peace.

Technology must be returned to human and ecological flourishing.

Education must be returned to the development of persons and worlds.

Knowledge must be returned to truth-serving and life-serving perception.

Democracy must be returned to shared world-conservation.

This reversal is not nostalgic. It is not a return to a past order. It is a re-grounding of political modernity in the life conditions it has too often denied.

The great inversion asks life to adapt to the system.

Life-coherent politics asks the system to answer to life (McMurtry, 2011).

Yet reversing this inversion does not abolish constraint, conflict, scarcity, or tragedy; it changes how societies must govern when every available option carries cost.

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## 11. Life-Coherent Governance Under Constraint and Tragic Choice

A life-coherent politics must avoid the temptation of innocence. It cannot pretend that every conflict can be harmonized, every need fully met immediately, every ecological damage reversed, every institution purified, or every decision made without loss. Politics occurs under constraint. Budgets are finite. Time is limited. Knowledge is partial. Communities disagree. Ecological thresholds matter. Emergency conditions arise. Harms may already be advanced. Choices sometimes involve competing goods, uncertain consequences, and unavoidable grief.

The question is not whether politics can escape tragedy. It cannot.

The question is whether tragedy becomes an excuse for life-blindness, or whether it deepens responsibility.

Tragic choice occurs when political decision-makers face situations in which every available option carries serious cost. A pandemic may require restrictions that protect public health while damaging livelihoods and social connection. Climate adaptation may require relocation from places of deep cultural attachment. Public budgets may force prioritization among urgent needs. Peace negotiations may require engagement with actors responsible for harm. Disaster triage may require decisions before full information is available. Ecological protection may constrain immediate economic activity. Migration policy may strain receiving communities while exclusion endangers those displaced.

Life-coherent politics does not deny these dilemmas. It provides a way to navigate them without normalizing domination or abandonment.

The first principle is **life-ground priority**.

Where choices are tragic, the conditions of life must be protected first: bodily survival, water, food, shelter, care, public health, ecological stability, and protection from direct violence. This does not answer every question, but it establishes a hierarchy. Political systems should not sacrifice basic life necessities to preserve luxury consumption, symbolic advantage, administrative convenience, or avoidable accumulation.

The second principle is **least life-capacity suppression**.

When harm cannot be avoided entirely, decisions should minimize the suppression of life-capacity across affected groups and generations. This requires more than counting immediate deaths or costs. It requires attention to long-term health, developmental harm, social trust, ecological damage, psychological burden, cultural loss, and future options. A policy that appears efficient in the short term may suppress life-capacity over decades.

The third principle is **burden fairness**.

Tragic choices often reveal power asymmetries. Those with the least political power are frequently asked to bear the greatest sacrifice. Life-coherent governance must ask who carries

the burden, who benefits, who decides, who is protected, who is made invisible, and who has already been overburdened historically. Fairness does not mean identical burden. It means that burden must be justified in relation to need, capacity, responsibility, history, and repair.

The fourth principle is **participatory legitimacy**.

Those affected by tragic decisions must have meaningful voice wherever possible. Emergency may compress time, but it does not erase accountability. Communities facing relocation, rationing, public-health restrictions, land-use change, or economic transition must not be treated as objects of administration. Participation improves perception. It reveals consequences that distant decision-makers may miss. It also preserves dignity under constraint.

The fifth principle is **truthful naming**.

Life-coherent governance must not hide tragic costs behind euphemism. If a policy harms some people to protect others, that harm must be named. If ecological damage is irreversible, it must be named. If a budget choice leaves needs unmet, those needs must be named. If uncertainty exists, uncertainty must be named. Truthful naming prevents political language from converting sacrifice into invisibility.

The sixth principle is **repair obligation**.

Where harm is imposed, even for defensible reasons, repair must be built into the decision. Compensation, care, restoration, institutional reform, monitoring, and long-term support are not optional afterthoughts. They are part of the legitimacy of the decision. A society that makes tragic choices without repair becomes morally numb. It learns to govern by abandonment.

The seventh principle is **reversibility and learning**.

Where knowledge is uncertain, life-coherent governance should prefer reversible, adaptive, and monitored interventions where possible. It should build feedback loops into policy design. If a measure produces unexpected harm, institutions must be able to correct course without humiliation or denial. This requires humility: the willingness to treat policy as learning rather than performance.

The eighth principle is **future accountability**.

Tragic choices must not offload harm onto future generations simply because they cannot object. Long-term ecological, fiscal, infrastructural, and social consequences must enter present deliberation. The unborn cannot vote, but they are affected. Life-coherent politics must represent them through institutions, law, ethics, and public imagination.

The ninth principle is **non-domination under emergency**.

Emergencies create openings for concentrated power. Sometimes rapid action is necessary. But emergency authority must remain bounded, transparent, time-limited, reviewable, and

answerable to the life-ground. Crisis must not become a permanent method of rule. Life-coherent governance must distinguish urgent coordination from opportunistic domination.

The tenth principle is **preservation of relational possibility**.

Even under conflict, politics should preserve the possibility of future coexistence. This is especially important in divided societies. Policies that humiliate, collectively punish, demonize, or permanently exclude may achieve short-term control while destroying the relational basis of peace. Life-coherent governance seeks correction without unnecessary degradation of persons.

These principles do not eliminate tragedy. They discipline it.

They prevent political actors from saying, “There was no alternative,” when alternatives were not explored.

They prevent institutions from saying, “The numbers required it,” when the numbers excluded life damage.

They prevent leaders from saying, “Sacrifice was necessary,” when sacrifice was imposed on the powerless.

They prevent systems from saying, “Order was restored,” when trust, dignity, and future viability were destroyed.

Life-coherent politics must be especially careful with the language of realism (Sen, 1999; McMurtry, 2011). Realism is often invoked to discipline moral imagination. People are told to be realistic about poverty, war, ecological destruction, inequality, debt, exploitation, or institutional cruelty. But realism that excludes the life-ground is not realism. It is system loyalty. Genuine realism begins from the real conditions by which life continues.

A life-coherent realism does not ask: what does the system require in order to continue unchanged?

It asks: what does life require, given the constraints we actually face?

This distinction matters. Under life-blind realism, the vulnerable are told to adapt to harmful systems. Under life-coherent realism, systems are asked to adapt to the requirements of life. The former produces resignation. The latter produces responsible repair.

Governance under tragic choice must also preserve grief. Political systems often rush from harm to justification. They explain, defend, quantify, and move on. But life-coherent politics must allow societies to grieve what is lost. Grief is not anti-political. It is a form of truth. It prevents the conversion of loss into abstraction. It keeps the living significance of decisions visible.

This is particularly important in climate adaptation, public health, migration, and post-conflict reconstruction. Communities may lose homes, landscapes, rituals, livelihoods, or loved ones

even when decisions are necessary. A politics that cannot honor grief cannot repair the field. It will produce compliance without healing.

Life-coherent governance is therefore neither utopian nor cynical. It accepts constraint without worshipping it. It accepts tragedy without normalizing sacrifice. It accepts conflict without denying coexistence. It accepts uncertainty without abandoning responsibility. It accepts limits without surrendering imagination.

Its guiding question under tragic choice is:

What action protects the life-ground, minimizes life-capacity suppression, distributes burden fairly, includes affected voices, names harm truthfully, builds repair into the decision, preserves future options, and avoids domination?

Where politics can answer this question honestly, it becomes more mature.

Where it refuses the question, it remains life-blind.

The next question is how these principles enter ordinary governance: how policies can be designed not merely to administer systems, but to repair the living fields those systems affect.

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## Part IV. Institutions, Political Economy, and Repair

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### 12. Policy Design as Field Repair

If politics is the governance of shared life-capacity, then policy is not merely the production of rules, programs, incentives, budgets, or targets. Policy is an intervention in a living field. It alters relations among persons, institutions, communities, economies, ecosystems, meanings, and futures. It can repair the field, ignore the field, or damage the field while appearing administratively successful.

Life-coherent policy design begins from this recognition.

A policy is life-coherent when it improves the conditions under which affected beings and communities can meet life necessities, develop capacities, participate meaningfully, remain within ecological limits, and recover from harm (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Raworth, 2017). It is life-incoherent when it solves a narrow administrative problem by displacing cost onto bodies, households, communities, ecosystems, workers, caregivers, future generations, or less visible parts of the system.

This distinction matters because policy failure is often misread. A program may meet its output targets while failing to repair the underlying field. A housing policy may produce units while weakening community. An education reform may raise test scores while narrowing learning. A health policy may reduce expenditures while increasing suffering. A policing strategy may reduce visible disorder while deepening mistrust. A climate policy may reduce emissions while imposing unjust burdens on already vulnerable communities. A digital policy may increase access while exposing people to surveillance, manipulation, or attention capture.

Life-coherent policy design therefore asks not only, “Did the intervention work?” but “What did it do to the field?”

Field repair begins by locating the pattern of incoherence. The problem is rarely only the symptom that appears in administrative data. Homelessness is not only lack of shelter; it may reveal housing markets, land policy, wages, mental health, family breakdown, addiction, trauma, planning systems, migration, and weakened care networks. Food insecurity is not only lack of calories; it may reveal poverty, import dependency, agricultural policy, land access, climate vulnerability, transport, education, and market concentration. Violence is not only individual aggression; it may reveal humiliation, exclusion, trauma, illicit economies, weak institutions, gender domination, cultural scripts, and loss of future possibility.

Policy design becomes life-coherent when it sees the symptom as a signal from the field.

The first task is therefore diagnostic humility. A policy-maker must resist premature closure. Before naming a solution, the field must be read. Who is affected? What necessities are unmet? What histories produced the condition? What constraints are real? What margins have been exhausted? What forms of knowledge are missing? What harms are visible, and which are hidden? What relationships have broken down? What institutions are miscoupled? What incentives sustain the pattern? What ecological limits are being ignored? What options are unavailable to those most affected?

This requires multiple forms of knowledge. Quantitative data are necessary but not sufficient. Lived experience, local memory, ecological observation, clinical judgment, community testimony, historical analysis, professional expertise, and intergenerational concern must enter the design process. A policy that excludes situated knowledge will misread the field. A policy that excludes evidence will misread causation. A policy that excludes ethical judgment will misread value.

The second task is to identify the life-capacity pathway. Every policy should be able to explain how it protects, restores, or expands life-capacity. Does it improve health? Reduce exposure to harm? Increase access to necessities? Restore ecological function? Improve trust? Expand real options? Strengthen care? Improve learning? Reduce domination? Preserve future possibilities? Without such a pathway, policy becomes activity without life-ground accountability.

The third task is to protect margins. Policies often fail because they consume the very reserves that make adaptation possible. A labor policy that increases productivity by exhausting workers is not life-coherent. A hospital reform that improves throughput by burning out staff is not life-coherent. An education policy that increases measurable performance by narrowing childhood is not life-coherent. A budget policy that stabilizes fiscal indicators by weakening households and public health is not life-coherent. Policy design must ask what margins are being used, whose margins are being depleted, and how margins will be restored.

The fourth task is to avoid displacement. In life-blind systems, solutions often move harm from one place to another. A city removes visible homelessness by displacing people to peripheral areas. A country reduces emissions by importing carbon-intensive goods from elsewhere. A budget reduces public expenditure by increasing unpaid care work. A platform increases convenience by shifting risk to precarious workers. A security policy protects one group by intensifying fear in another. Life-coherent policy must trace the whole field of consequences, including delayed, indirect, and displaced harms.

The fifth task is to build feedback. Policy must not be treated as a finished command. It is a living experiment in a complex field. Life-coherent policy requires monitoring, participation, correction, transparency, and the ability to revise course. A policy that cannot hear harm becomes dangerous. A policy that cannot admit error becomes brittle. A policy that cannot learn becomes ideology. Feedback must include those most affected, not only those administering the program.

The sixth task is to design for repair, not merely compliance. Compliance asks whether people follow the rule. Repair asks whether the condition that made the rule necessary is being

transformed. A punitive welfare policy may compel compliance while deepening shame and insecurity. A restorative social policy may build capacity, trust, and reciprocal responsibility. A coercive public-health measure may produce short-term compliance while damaging trust. A participatory public-health strategy may produce slower but more durable cooperation. Life-coherent policy does not romanticize non-coercion; some constraints are necessary. But it asks whether constraint restores the field or merely forces behavior.

The seventh task is to preserve dignity. Policies communicate what a society believes about people. A policy may treat persons as burdens, risks, consumers, clients, cases, data points, criminals, beneficiaries, or co-participants. Life-coherent policy treats persons as living beings embedded in relationships, histories, vulnerabilities, capacities, and worlds. It does not humiliate people in order to help them. It does not require degradation as the price of support. It does not make access to necessities depend on rituals of suspicion.

The eighth task is to align scales. Many political problems are misgoverned because the scale of decision does not match the scale of life. A local watershed may be governed by distant agencies. A global climate process may be addressed by fragmented local tools. A national health policy may ignore household care. A community conflict may be driven by international economic forces. Life-coherent policy requires nested governance: local participation, regional coordination, national responsibility, and global accountability where appropriate.

The ninth task is to name trade-offs truthfully. No policy has only benefits. Life-coherent design does not hide costs. It asks who pays, who gains, who decides, who is at risk, what uncertainty remains, and what repair is owed. Honest trade-off analysis is not an obstacle to action. It is part of moral clarity.

The tenth task is to ask whether the policy increases real options. A life-coherent policy should expand the viable pathways available to people and communities. It should make it easier to live, care, learn, heal, participate, work with dignity, remain rooted, adapt when necessary, and contribute to the shared world. A policy that increases formal choice while reducing real options is politically incoherent.

Policy design as field repair therefore follows a different sequence from conventional administrative problem-solving.

It does not begin with a program. It begins with the life-field.

It does not begin with an output. It begins with a harmed relation.

It does not begin with compliance. It begins with capacity.

It does not begin with institutional convenience. It begins with affected life.

It does not end when the policy is implemented. It continues until the field shows signs of repair.

A life-coherent policy process can be summarized through seven questions:

1. What life-capacity is being suppressed?
2. What field conditions are producing this suppression?
3. What life-serving capacities already exist in the field?
4. What intervention would restore necessities, margins, trust, participation, and ecological fit?
5. What harms might the intervention displace or create?
6. What feedback will allow correction?
7. What would count as repair from the standpoint of affected life?

These questions do not replace technical policy analysis. They deepen it. Cost-benefit analysis, legal review, epidemiological modeling, environmental assessment, fiscal planning, administrative design, and institutional evaluation remain important. But they must be nested within life-ground accountability. The ultimate question is not whether the policy is technically elegant, politically convenient, or fiscally efficient. The ultimate question is whether it helps the living field become more viable.

Policy is life-coherent when it becomes repair made institutional.

Field repair cannot depend on temporary goodwill or isolated programs; it requires institutions capable of conserving life-capacity across time.

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## 13. Institutions of the Civil Commons

Life-coherent politics cannot depend on goodwill alone. It requires institutions that conserve life-capacity across time (Ostrom, 1990; McMurtry, 2011). Without institutions, care remains episodic, repair remains fragile, and political insight disappears with the people who carry it. Institutions are the memory, coordination, accountability, and continuity structures of political life.

Yet institutions are ambivalent. They can protect life, or they can become life-blind. They can coordinate care, or they can administer abandonment. They can preserve collective memory, or they can reproduce historical violence. They can secure rights, or they can transform living persons into files, cases, risks, and burdens. They can hold power accountable, or they can protect power from those harmed by it.

Life-coherent politics therefore asks what kinds of institutions are required for the civil commons to endure.

The first institution of the civil commons is public health.

Public health is political infrastructure because it protects the conditions of embodied participation. Clean water, sanitation, vaccination, disease surveillance, primary care, maternal and child health, environmental health, nutrition, mental health, emergency preparedness, occupational health, and health equity are not sectoral concerns alone. They determine whether people can live, learn, work, deliberate, care, and participate. A society that neglects public health weakens the body of democracy.

The second is education.

Education is the civil commons through which a society renews its capacity for judgment. Its purpose cannot be reduced to labor-market preparation or competitive ranking. A life-coherent education system develops persons who can read reality, care for truth, understand history, think scientifically, reason ethically, participate democratically, appreciate culture, live ecologically, and imagine futures beyond inherited harm. Education is not only preparation for the economy. It is preparation for world-participation.

The third is ecological guardianship.

Rivers, forests, soils, reefs, wetlands, coastlines, air, biodiversity, and climate systems require institutional protection because they are life-support systems. Ministries, courts, local councils, protected-area systems, watershed authorities, environmental monitoring bodies, Indigenous governance systems, and community stewardship arrangements all become part of the political infrastructure of life-coherence when they protect ecological regeneration rather than merely manage extraction. Ecological guardianship must be more than permitting. It must be a form of intergenerational care.

The fourth is care infrastructure.

Care is often treated as private, feminine, informal, or economically secondary. Life-coherent politics recognizes care as foundational. Childcare, elder care, disability support, family support, community health work, mental-health care, palliative care, social work, and caregiver protection are not residual services. They are the relational infrastructure through which life is reproduced, healed, and accompanied. A society that exploits care while underfunding it consumes its own conditions of continuity.

The fifth is housing and land security.

Housing is not merely shelter or real estate. It is a condition of health, family life, education, safety, belonging, memory, and political participation. Land is not merely property. It is ecological, cultural, historical, and intergenerational. Life-coherent institutions must prevent housing and land from becoming purely speculative assets detached from life necessity. They must protect secure dwelling, ecological stewardship, community continuity, and equitable access.

The sixth is food and water sovereignty.

A society that cannot secure nourishing food and safe water is politically vulnerable at the life-ground. Food systems, agricultural policy, fisheries, seed systems, school meals, water utilities, watershed protection, pricing structures, emergency reserves, and regional cooperation are therefore political institutions of viability. Life-coherent politics asks whether food and water systems nourish life, regenerate ecosystems, support dignified livelihoods, and remain resilient under disturbance.

The seventh is democratic accountability.

Elections are essential, but not sufficient. Life-coherent accountability also requires independent courts, ombuds institutions, audit systems, anti-corruption bodies, participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies, local councils, transparent procurement, whistleblower protections, public-interest journalism, access to information, and community monitoring. Accountability is the feedback system through which the polity detects and corrects harm.

The eighth is knowledge commons.

Libraries, universities, schools, public data systems, archives, scientific institutions, cultural institutions, open-access knowledge, community research, and independent media are civil commons because they protect shared perception. A society that loses its knowledge commons becomes vulnerable to manipulation, denial, fragmentation, and life-blind decision-making. Truth is not owned by institutions, but institutions can protect or corrupt the conditions of truth-seeking.

The ninth is peace and conflict-transformation infrastructure.

Police, courts, and military systems are often treated as the core of security. Life-coherent politics broadens the frame. Security requires mediation, restorative justice, trauma healing, violence prevention, youth development, gender justice, community dialogue, demilitarization where possible, reintegration pathways, and institutions that address structural causes of conflict. Peace is not merely the suppression of disorder. It is the organization of conditions under which violence becomes less likely and repair becomes possible.

The tenth is economic provisioning.

Central banks, treasuries, labor ministries, cooperatives, credit unions, public banks, social-protection systems, procurement agencies, employment programs, industrial policy, taxation systems, and regulatory bodies shape whether the economy serves life or life serves the economy. They are not neutral machinery. They encode value. Life-coherent economic institutions must protect necessities, prevent predation, support dignified work, reduce precarity, preserve ecological limits, and expand shared capacity.

The eleventh is emergency and resilience infrastructure.

Disasters reveal the condition of the civil commons. Emergency shelters, early-warning systems, public communication, supply reserves, health surge capacity, social registries, community response networks, infrastructure redundancy, climate adaptation, and post-disaster recovery systems all determine whether disturbance becomes catastrophe. Life-coherent resilience is not merely the ability to bounce back. It is the ability to recover toward greater justice, ecological fit, and social trust.

The twelfth is intergenerational guardianship.

Future generations require institutional representation because they cannot represent themselves in present political arenas. Life-coherent politics may require future-generation commissioners, youth councils, ecological trust funds, long-term impact assessments, constitutional duties, public debt transparency, climate-risk disclosure, and legal standing for future harms. The future must have a seat in present governance.

These institutions do not exist in isolation. They form a civil-commons ecology. Health depends on housing, food, water, education, ecological conditions, income, and care. Education depends on nutrition, safety, family stability, culture, public trust, and health. Democracy depends on knowledge, time, security, media, economic dignity, and participation. Ecological guardianship depends on law, science, local knowledge, economic alternatives, and intergenerational ethics.

Life-coherent politics therefore rejects siloed governance. It asks how institutions couple to one another in the living field.

When institutions are well-coupled, they reinforce life-capacity. Schools connect with health systems. Housing policy connects with climate adaptation. Agriculture connects with nutrition and ecological regeneration. Disaster planning connects with social protection. Economic policy

connects with care. Courts connect with restorative pathways. Universities connect with communities. Public finance connects with future responsibility.

When institutions are miscoupled, they generate incoherence. Health systems treat illness produced by food systems. Schools discipline children harmed by poverty. Courts punish symptoms of social abandonment. Environmental agencies regulate damage authorized by development agencies. Caregivers compensate for austerity. Communities are asked to be resilient after planning systems made them vulnerable. Public money repairs harms that private actors profit from producing.

Institutional life-coherence therefore requires alignment around the life-ground.

This alignment does not mean central control of everything. It means shared orientation. Each institution must understand its contribution to life-capacity, its dependencies on other institutions, and its accountability to affected life. Institutions must learn to ask: What part of the civil commons do we protect? What life-capacity do we enable? What harms do we risk producing? What feedback do we receive? Whose knowledge is missing? What margins do we consume? What repair do we owe?

The health of a political order can be read through the condition of its institutions of the civil commons.

Where these institutions are strong, accessible, trusted, participatory, ecologically grounded, and accountable, people experience politics as shared protection.

Where they are weak, captured, fragmented, punitive, opaque, or market-subordinated, people experience politics as abandonment, suspicion, or extraction.

Life-coherent politics does not merely demand better leaders. It demands institutions capable of conserving life.

Among these institutions, political economy is decisive, because it governs how societies provision necessities, distribute burdens, reward activity, allocate risk, and define value.

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## 14. Life-Coherent Political Economy

No inquiry into life-coherent politics can avoid political economy. The economy is not separate from politics. It is one of the principal ways a society organizes access to life necessities, distributes burdens and benefits, shapes time, structures dependency, rewards behavior, allocates risk, and defines what counts as value.

A life-coherent political economy begins from a simple reversal:

The economy exists within society, society exists within the biosphere, and the biosphere exists as the living ground of all human possibility (Raworth, 2017; Rockström et al., 2009).

Life-blind political economy reverses this order. It treats the economy as the primary reality, society as an adjustment mechanism, and the biosphere as resource base, waste sink, or externality. People are then asked to adapt their lives to market requirements, fiscal indicators, investor confidence, productivity demands, debt obligations, competitiveness rankings, and growth targets. Ecological systems are asked to absorb the consequences. Future generations are asked to inherit the debt.

Life-coherent political economy restores the correct order. Economic systems are legitimate only insofar as they provision life within ecological limits.

This does not mean that markets, enterprise, trade, innovation, and investment are rejected. It means they are placed within life-ground boundaries. Markets may coordinate exchange, signal scarcity, support creativity, and distribute goods. But markets cannot be permitted to decide the value of life itself. They cannot be allowed to convert all necessities into profit opportunities, all relations into transactions, all attention into extractable data, all land into speculative asset, all care into unpaid depletion, and all futures into discounted revenue streams.

The first task of life-coherent political economy is to distinguish life-serving value from money-value (McMurtry, 1998, 2011, 2013).

Money-value measures exchangeability within markets. Life-value measures contribution to life-capacity. The two may overlap, but they are not the same. A nurse, teacher, farmer, wastewater operator, caregiver, public-health worker, ecological restorer, community mediator, and honest civil servant may generate enormous life-value while being poorly rewarded in money terms. Speculation, planned obsolescence, predatory lending, pollution-intensive production, addictive digital design, and destructive extraction may generate money-value while degrading life-capacity.

A life-coherent economy must therefore ask not only how much value is produced, but what kind of value, for whom, by what means, and with what consequences for the life-ground.

The second task is to secure universal life necessities.

Food, water, shelter, health care, education, sanitation, energy access, care, bodily security, and ecological safety cannot be treated as ordinary commodities alone. When necessities are governed primarily by ability to pay, life itself becomes stratified by purchasing power. The result is not freedom, but conditional survival. Life-coherent political economy requires institutional guarantees that people can access the necessities required for participation and development.

These guarantees may take different forms depending on context: public provisioning, regulated markets, cooperatives, social insurance, community ownership, universal basic services, targeted support, price protections, public utilities, rights-based entitlements, or mixed systems. The institutional form matters, but the life-coherent criterion is deeper: necessities must be reliably available, accessible, acceptable, ecologically sustainable, and protected from predatory enclosure.

The third task is to protect dignified work and meaningful livelihood.

Work is not only income. It is participation in shared life. It can provide dignity, identity, skill, belonging, contribution, and structure. But work can also become exploitation, exhaustion, humiliation, injury, domination, and time theft. A life-coherent political economy asks whether work supports or suppresses life-capacity. Does it provide living wages, safety, time for care, voice, learning, social protection, and ecological responsibility? Or does it consume bodies and communities for profit?

Dignified livelihood also extends beyond formal employment. Care work, subsistence activity, community work, cultural work, ecological stewardship, mutual aid, and informal labor all contribute to life-capacity. A life-coherent economy must make visible and protect the forms of work that reproduce life but are often excluded from economic recognition.

The fourth task is to revalue care.

Care is the hidden foundation of all economies. Every worker, entrepreneur, official, scientist, artist, and citizen was once cared for. Every society depends on the daily labor of feeding, cleaning, teaching, healing, comforting, accompanying, raising children, supporting the elderly, and sustaining households. Yet care is frequently unpaid, underpaid, gendered, racialized, privatized, and taken for granted.

When political economy ignores care, it consumes the future. Children suffer. Caregivers burn out. Elders are abandoned. Health systems overload. Communities weaken. Women's opportunities are constrained. Emotional development is compromised. Social trust erodes.

Life-coherent political economy recognizes care as primary infrastructure. It must be supported through public services, labor protections, income supports, workplace flexibility, gender equity, community care systems, caregiver respite, child development policy, elder care, disability inclusion, and cultural recognition. Care is not a sentimental exception to the economy. It is the condition that makes economic life possible.

The fifth task is ecological provisioning.

A life-coherent economy must fit within ecological regeneration. This requires shifting from extractive throughput to circular, regenerative, low-carbon, biodiversity-protecting, water-secure, soil-restoring, and sufficiency-oriented systems. It requires distinguishing between needs and excess, between development and depletion, between resilience and overconsumption, between prosperity and throughput.

This shift cannot be imposed unjustly. Ecological transition must be socially grounded. Workers and communities dependent on harmful industries require pathways, not abandonment. Climate policy must protect the poor, not punish them. Energy transition must avoid new forms of extraction and sacrifice. Food-system transformation must support farmers and consumers. Life-coherent ecological economics must therefore be just transition economics.

The sixth task is to democratize economic power.

Economic arrangements shape life chances. When ownership, finance, land, data, media, and production are highly concentrated, democracy is weakened. People may vote politically while being governed economically by forces they cannot influence. A life-coherent political economy requires forms of accountability over economic power: labor voice, cooperative ownership, antitrust enforcement, public-interest regulation, community benefit agreements, participatory budgeting, public banking, transparent procurement, data governance, tax justice, and protections against corruption and capture.

Democratizing economic power does not require uniform ownership models. It requires that economic systems remain answerable to the communities, workers, ecosystems, and futures they affect.

The seventh task is to redesign indicators.

What a society measures shapes what it governs. If political economy measures success primarily through gross domestic product, investment flows, productivity, fiscal balances, and market growth, then life-capacity may disappear from the dashboard. Activities that degrade health, trust, care, and ecosystems may appear positive if they increase monetary transactions. Activities that prevent harm may appear invisible if no market exchange occurs.

Life-coherent political economy requires indicators that track life necessities, health equity, ecological integrity, care time, housing security, educational development, social trust, democratic participation, food and water security, meaningful work, psychological well-being, carbon and material footprints, biodiversity, public debt quality, and intergenerational risk. These indicators should not become technocratic idols. They should serve democratic perception and correction.

The eighth task is to transform finance.

Finance should serve life-serving investment. It should help societies build housing, renewable energy, ecological restoration, public health, education, food systems, infrastructure, small enterprise, cooperative development, and climate adaptation. When finance becomes self-referential, speculative, predatory, or detached from real provisioning, it drains life-capacity. Debt can build the future, or it can mortgage the future. Credit can enable participation, or it can entrap. Investment can regenerate, or it can extract.

Life-coherent finance must therefore be evaluated by what it enables in the real life-field. Does it fund necessities? Does it reduce vulnerability? Does it restore ecosystems? Does it strengthen local capacity? Does it distribute risk fairly? Does it preserve future fiscal space? Does it remain democratically accountable?

The ninth task is to protect small places within large systems.

Global political economy often renders small communities vulnerable to distant forces: commodity prices, tourism shocks, debt markets, climate change, supply chains, trade rules, geopolitical conflict, insurance retreat, platform monopolies, and capital flight. Life-coherent politics must protect the viability of local and regional life-worlds within global interdependence. This is especially important for small island developing states, rural communities, Indigenous territories, coastal settlements, and economically dependent regions.

Self-reliance does not mean isolation. It means having enough local and regional capacity, diversity, resilience, and agency to avoid total dependency on systems that do not answer to local life. Food security, energy resilience, water protection, local enterprise, cultural continuity, regional cooperation, and community ownership become political-economic necessities.

The tenth task is to reframe prosperity.

Prosperity is not the endless expansion of consumption. Prosperity is the condition in which life-capacity is secure, relationally rich, ecologically grounded, culturally meaningful, and future-compatible. A prosperous society is one in which people can breathe clean air, drink safe water, eat nourishing food, live in secure housing, receive care, learn, love, participate, create, rest, dissent, recover, and pass on a viable world.

A society may be materially wealthy and life-poor. It may have high consumption and low trust, advanced technology and loneliness, rising productivity and exhausted workers, private luxury and public decay, financial sophistication and ecological overshoot. Life-coherent political economy refuses to call this success.

The central test is therefore:

Does the economy provision life, regenerate the commons, protect margins, distribute options fairly, and remain within ecological limits?

If yes, it is moving toward life-coherence.

If no, it may be growing while becoming politically and biologically incoherent.

Life-coherent political economy is not anti-economy. It is economy returned to its proper place: the provisioning metabolism of a living society within a living Earth.

It asks money to serve value.

It asks markets to serve provisioning.

It asks work to serve dignity.

It asks finance to serve the future.

It asks technology to serve life-capacity.

It asks growth to justify itself before the life-ground.

And it asks politics to ensure that no economic system becomes powerful enough to demand sacrifice from life while calling itself reality.

When political economy either secures or deprives people of life necessities, it also shapes the conditions of peace, fear, domination, and violence.

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## 15. Peace, Security, and Non-Domination

Security is one of the oldest justifications for political authority. States promise protection from violence, invasion, disorder, crime, instability, and fear. This promise is not trivial. Without bodily security, people cannot live freely. Without protection from direct violence, other political goods become fragile. A society that cannot protect persons from killing, assault, coercion, dispossession, and terror cannot claim life-coherent legitimacy.

Yet security becomes life-incoherent when it is detached from peace.

Security, in its life-coherent sense, is not merely the capacity of a state to control territory, defeat enemies, police populations, or suppress disorder. It is the protection of the conditions under which persons and communities can live without domination. It includes freedom from direct violence, but also freedom from structural abandonment, ecological exposure, humiliation, fear, hunger, preventable disease, and the patterned denial of life necessities.

A life-coherent politics therefore distinguishes between **security as control** and **security as life-protection**.

Security as control asks: how can threats be contained?

Security as life-protection asks: what conditions generate threat, vulnerability, fear, and violence, and how can they be transformed without reproducing domination?

The distinction is crucial. Control can suppress symptoms while deepening causes. A policing strategy may reduce visible disorder while intensifying mistrust. A border policy may deter movement while worsening human suffering. A military strategy may defeat an enemy while leaving structural grievances untouched. A surveillance system may increase state capacity while eroding democratic freedom. A prison system may incapacitate some offenders while reproducing trauma, stigma, and social fragmentation. A security doctrine may protect some lives by rendering others permanently suspect.

Life-coherent security must therefore remain answerable to peace.

Peace is not merely the absence of open violence (Galtung, 1969). Negative peace—the cessation of direct violence—is necessary, but insufficient. A society may be formally at peace while people live under structural violence: preventable poverty, exclusion, racism, ecological contamination, avoidable disease, gender domination, economic coercion, or administrative abandonment (Galtung, 1969, 1990). Peace becomes positive only when the conditions that suppress life-capacity are transformed.

This does not mean that all social problems are reducible to security. Rather, it means that real security cannot be separated from the life-ground. Hunger is a security issue when it destabilizes households and bodies. Water insecurity is a security issue when it threatens health and social

trust. Climate disruption is a security issue when it destroys livelihoods, displaces communities, and intensifies conflict. Inequality is a security issue when it produces humiliation, resentment, desperation, and institutional distrust. Disinformation is a security issue when it destroys shared reality. Ecological degradation is a security issue when it undermines the conditions of future life.

Life-coherent politics therefore reframes security as the protection of shared viability.

The first principle of life-coherent security is **non-domination**. Protection must not become a pretext for arbitrary power. People should not be made safe by being made voiceless. Communities should not be pacified by being humiliated. Dissent should not be treated as disorder merely because it challenges authority. Emergency powers should not become permanent instruments of control. Surveillance should not replace trust. Order should not be purchased by destroying dignity.

The second principle is **prevention through life-capacity**. Violence is more likely where people experience humiliation, exclusion, deprivation, trauma, fear, blocked futures, weak institutions, and loss of belonging. Life-coherent security invests upstream: early childhood development, public health, education, dignified work, housing, mental-health care, youth opportunity, gender justice, community mediation, ecological protection, and trust-building. These are not “soft” alternatives to security. They are the conditions that reduce the need for coercive security.

The third principle is **proportionality and accountability**. Coercive force may sometimes be necessary to prevent immediate harm. But when used, it must be limited, accountable, transparent, reviewable, and oriented toward restoring conditions of coexistence. Force that escapes accountability becomes domination. Force that humiliates becomes future violence. Force that protects some by degrading others weakens the moral basis of security.

The fourth principle is **conflict transformation**. Conflict is not identical with violence. Conflict can reveal unmet needs, misrecognized identities, unjust structures, ecological pressures, institutional failures, and historical wounds. Life-coherent politics does not seek to eliminate conflict by silencing it. It seeks to transform conflict so that it becomes a pathway of truth, repair, and renegotiated coexistence. This requires mediation, restorative justice, dialogue, truth-telling, reparative policy, and institutions capable of hearing grievances before they harden into violence.

The fifth principle is **human security**. Security must be evaluated from the standpoint of persons and communities, not states alone. The state is an instrument of protection, not the ultimate subject of protection (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). A state that is secure while its people live in hunger, fear, ecological exposure, or institutional abandonment is not life-coherently secure. National security must be nested within human, ecological, and intergenerational security.

The sixth principle is **ecological peace**. There can be no durable peace where ecological systems are collapsing. Climate disruption, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, food insecurity, and disaster vulnerability intensify conflict and displacement. Life-coherent security

must therefore include ecological restoration, adaptation, resource justice, disaster preparedness, and protection of communities most exposed to environmental harm.

The seventh principle is **demilitarization of political imagination**. A society becomes life-incoherent when it interprets too many problems through threat, enemy, and control frames. Not every disorder is a security threat. Not every dissenter is a destabilizer. Not every migrant is a danger. Not every youth in distress is a criminal. Not every community protest is disorder. Life-coherent politics expands the political imagination beyond coercion so that care, justice, participation, and repair become available responses.

The eighth principle is **repair after harm**. Violence leaves residues in bodies, families, neighborhoods, institutions, memory, and land. A political order that stops violence without repairing its consequences remains unstable. Life-coherent security includes trauma healing, restitution, reintegration, truth processes, memorialization, institutional reform, and social reconstruction. Without repair, peace becomes a pause between harms.

Security, then, is not abolished by life-coherent politics. It is deepened.

The police officer, mediator, teacher, nurse, planner, public-health worker, environmental scientist, journalist, judge, social worker, youth mentor, community elder, emergency responder, and caregiver all participate in security when they protect life-capacity and reduce the conditions of violence.

A life-coherent security system asks:

Who is unsafe, and why?

Whose fear is recognized, and whose fear is dismissed?

What forms of violence are visible, and which are hidden in ordinary systems?

What harms are being prevented, and what harms are being produced by the methods of prevention?

What conditions would make coercion less necessary?

What repair is owed after protection fails?

What would security mean from the standpoint of the child, the elderly person, the migrant, the disabled person, the threatened woman, the poor household, the coastal community, the polluted neighborhood, the future generation, and the ecosystem?

The final question is decisive. Security becomes life-coherent only when it protects the vulnerable without creating new zones of domination.

The aim is not control for its own sake.

The aim is peace with dignity, safety without abandonment, order without humiliation, protection without domination, and collective life without fear.

But no society can reduce violence, protect security, or repair domination if its knowledge systems are unable to perceive reality, hear harm, and correct error.

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## 16. Knowledge, Media, and Epistemic Commons

No political order can remain life-coherent if it cannot perceive reality. Knowledge is therefore not an ornament of democracy. It is a condition of political viability.

A society must be able to know when water is unsafe, when children are hungry, when institutions are corrupt, when violence is rising, when ecosystems are degrading, when diseases are spreading, when public money is misused, when communities are excluded, when climate risks are intensifying, when misinformation is distorting judgment, and when policies are harming those they were meant to serve (Maturana, 1988; McMurtry, 2011). Without shared ways of knowing, politics becomes blind, reactive, manipulable, and easily captured.

The **epistemic commons** refers to the shared conditions that allow a society to seek, test, preserve, communicate, contest, and correct knowledge. It includes education, science, public data, libraries, archives, journalism, civic dialogue, academic freedom, local knowledge, cultural memory, professional ethics, transparency laws, whistleblower protections, public-interest media, and trusted institutions of inquiry.

The epistemic commons is not a single institution. It is a living ecology of truth-seeking.

Life-coherent politics requires this ecology because political decisions are only as life-serving as the perception systems that inform them. A government that does not know where harm is occurring cannot repair it. A public that cannot distinguish evidence from manipulation cannot deliberate coherently. A media system that rewards outrage over understanding cannot sustain democratic judgment. A science system captured by money or ideology cannot protect the life-ground. An education system that trains compliance without critical thought cannot renew democratic capacity.

The collapse of epistemic commons produces several forms of political incoherence.

The first is **invisibility of harm**. When public systems fail to collect, share, or listen to relevant knowledge, suffering disappears from governance. Unmeasured pollution, hidden hunger, unreported violence, informal caregiving, school exclusion, mental-health distress, slow ecological decline, and administrative cruelty may continue because they do not enter the official field of perception.

The second is **fragmentation of reality**. When citizens inhabit separate information worlds, democratic disagreement loses its common ground. People no longer debate what should be done about shared facts; they dispute whether there is a shared reality at all. This makes repair difficult because every harm can be reframed as fabrication, every institution as conspiracy, every correction as manipulation, and every expert as enemy.

The third is **attention capture**. Political perception depends on attention. Where attention is harvested by platforms optimized for outrage, novelty, addiction, and tribal reinforcement, the

public loses the temporal and emotional margin required for judgment. The problem is not only false information. It is the degradation of attention as a civic resource.

The fourth is **knowledge enclosure**. When knowledge necessary for public life is locked behind paywalls, proprietary systems, corporate secrecy, bureaucratic opacity, or technical complexity, democratic participation weakens. People cannot govern what they cannot know. Life-coherent politics therefore requires open, accessible, trustworthy, and interpretable knowledge, especially in domains affecting health, environment, public finance, technology, and rights.

The fifth is **epistemic domination**. Some groups are systematically denied credibility. Their testimony is dismissed, their knowledge is treated as anecdotal, their suffering is individualized, or their histories are erased. Indigenous communities, patients, caregivers, workers, the poor, disabled persons, migrants, youth, and ecological stewards often hold knowledge essential for life-coherent governance. When institutions refuse to hear them, perception becomes structurally biased.

The sixth is **manufactured ignorance**. Powerful actors may benefit from doubt, confusion, delay, or denial. Industries may obscure ecological or health harms. Political actors may flood public space with misleading claims. Institutions may suppress inconvenient data. Media systems may amplify spectacle over truth. Manufactured ignorance is a form of cultural and epistemic violence because it disables the capacity to name and repair harm.

Life-coherent politics must therefore actively govern the conditions of public knowing.

This does not mean imposing a single official truth. That would be epistemic authoritarianism. The aim is not uniform belief, but accountable inquiry. A healthy epistemic commons allows disagreement, correction, plural perspectives, scientific debate, community testimony, investigative challenge, and institutional self-critique. It protects both truth-seeking and humility.

Several principles follow.

First, knowledge must be **life-accountable**. Data and research should help societies perceive and repair conditions affecting life-capacity. Not all knowledge must be instrumental, but public knowledge systems should not be detached from the life-ground. Health data, environmental monitoring, social indicators, educational assessment, economic statistics, and public records should be designed to reveal whether people and ecosystems are becoming more or less viable.

Second, knowledge must be **plural but disciplined**. Scientific expertise, lived experience, historical memory, Indigenous knowledge, clinical judgment, local observation, and democratic deliberation all matter. But plurality does not mean that all claims are equally valid. Claims must remain open to evidence, coherence, accountability, and correction. Life-coherent knowledge honors multiple ways of knowing without abandoning standards of truthfulness.

Third, knowledge must be **accessible**. A public cannot use knowledge it cannot reach or understand. Public-interest information should be translated into forms that communities can act upon: clear language, open data, visual tools, public dashboards, community meetings,

multilingual communication, school curricula, and trusted local intermediaries. Accessibility is not simplification into propaganda. It is the democratization of understanding.

Fourth, knowledge must be **protected from capture**. Scientific, regulatory, journalistic, and educational institutions require independence from undue political and commercial pressure. Conflicts of interest must be disclosed. Public-interest research must be funded. Regulatory data must not be controlled by those being regulated. Journalism must not be entirely dependent on attention markets that reward outrage. Education must not become indoctrination by state, market, or faction.

Fifth, knowledge must be **corrective**. A life-coherent epistemic commons must help institutions admit error and revise course. This requires audit, peer review, public challenge, whistleblower protection, investigative journalism, citizen science, community monitoring, and transparent policy evaluation. Correction is not institutional embarrassment. It is how living systems remain viable.

Sixth, knowledge must be **relational**. Facts do not enter politics as isolated units. They enter through trust. A community may reject accurate information if institutions have historically lied, ignored, exploited, or humiliated them. Rebuilding the epistemic commons therefore requires rebuilding trust. This cannot be achieved by messaging alone. It requires accountability, humility, listening, consistency, and repair of prior betrayal.

Media occupy a central place in this ecology. Media can help societies perceive one another, investigate power, connect local suffering to structural causes, explain complexity, preserve memory, and sustain democratic conversation. But media can also become engines of fragmentation, spectacle, humiliation, fear, and manipulation. A life-coherent media system would be judged not merely by freedom from censorship or market reach, but by its contribution to shared reality, civic understanding, accountability, and the reduction of life-blindness.

Digital platforms intensify the problem. They are not neutral channels. They structure attention, visibility, association, memory, desire, outrage, and belief. Algorithms can amplify fear and polarization because these produce engagement. Data extraction can convert persons into behavioral targets. Synthetic media can blur evidence. Platform monopolies can concentrate communicative power outside democratic accountability. Life-coherent politics must therefore treat digital governance as part of the epistemic commons.

This does not require rejecting digital technology. It requires subordinating digital systems to democratic and life-coherent purposes. Platform design should protect attention, children, privacy, deliberation, truthfulness, and civic trust. Public-interest digital infrastructure should be developed. Algorithmic systems affecting rights, health, finance, education, employment, policing, and political communication should be transparent, auditable, contestable, and accountable.

The epistemic commons also includes memory. Societies that forget harm repeat it. Historical memory, archives, museums, oral histories, truth commissions, public rituals, and education help communities remember what domination, ecological destruction, colonialism, war, exclusion,

and resistance have taught. Memory is not the enemy of reconciliation. Denial is. Life-coherent politics requires memory capable of repair rather than revenge.

A society's epistemic commons is healthy when people can ask:

What is happening?

Who is being harmed?

How do we know?

Who is not being heard?

What evidence is missing?

Who benefits from confusion?

What would change our mind?

How can affected communities participate in knowing?

What must be corrected?

What must be remembered?

When these questions can be asked publicly without fear, democracy breathes.

When they are suppressed, monetized, mocked, flooded, or captured, politics suffocates.

Knowledge is therefore a civil commons. It is one of the ways a society remains in contact with life.

When the epistemic commons is damaged, political disagreement can harden into mutual world-denial; polarization is therefore not only a problem of opinion, but a breakdown in the conditions of shared perception and repair.

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## 17. From Polarization to Participatory Repair

Polarization is often described as a problem of tone, civility, extremism, social media, misinformation, party sorting, identity, or institutional design. Each of these matters. Yet a life-coherent politics must ask a deeper question: what field conditions make polarization intelligible, rewarding, and self-reinforcing?

Polarization is not simply disagreement. Democratic life requires disagreement. People differ in values, histories, interests, experiences, fears, aspirations, and interpretations of the common good. A society without disagreement is not necessarily coherent; it may be silenced. The problem is not conflict itself. The problem is the conversion of conflict into mutual world-denial.

Polarization becomes life-incoherent when opponents cease to appear as co-participants in a shared world and instead appear as existential threats whose defeat, humiliation, exclusion, or disappearance becomes politically desirable (Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 2008). At that point, politics no longer functions as shared problem-solving under conditions of difference. It becomes identity defense under conditions of fear.

Life-coherent politics interprets polarization as a symptom of damaged relations, damaged perception, damaged participation, and damaged commons.

The first damage is **relational**. People lose contact across difference. They no longer encounter one another as whole persons embedded in families, histories, vulnerabilities, duties, and hopes. They meet instead as symbols: liberal, conservative, nationalist, globalist, elite, populist, secular, religious, migrant, native, urban, rural, expert, anti-expert, privileged, resentful, woke, reactionary. The person disappears behind the category.

The second damage is **epistemic**. Shared reality weakens. Different groups trust different sources, inhabit different narratives, and interpret the same event through incompatible moral worlds. Corrective evidence is treated as enemy propaganda. Institutions that once mediated reality are seen as captured or hostile. Public discourse becomes less about inquiry and more about loyalty.

The third damage is **material**. Polarization often feeds on real insecurity: economic precarity, regional abandonment, loss of status, racial injustice, ecological anxiety, cultural dislocation, housing stress, migration pressure, debt, illness, and the erosion of future possibility. When institutions fail to repair these conditions, anger seeks symbolic targets.

The fourth damage is **institutional**. Electoral systems, media markets, campaign finance, party incentives, legislative rules, and digital platforms may reward division. Politicians may benefit from fear. Media may benefit from outrage. Platforms may benefit from engagement. Fundraising may benefit from enemy images. Institutions may become structured to amplify the very patterns that weaken democratic life.

The fifth damage is **spiritual and existential**. People need meaning, belonging, recognition, and a sense that their lives matter within a larger world. When shared civic meaning erodes, political identity can become a substitute for belonging. The party, movement, nation, ideology, or online tribe becomes a vessel for dignity. Challenge to the group then feels like attack on the self.

Participatory repair begins by refusing superficial solutions.

It is not enough to tell people to be nicer. Civility without justice preserves harm.

It is not enough to fact-check harder. Facts without trust often fail to enter the field.

It is not enough to defeat the other side. Victory without repair deepens resentment.

It is not enough to create dialogue circles detached from material conditions. Conversation without structural change becomes therapeutic containment.

It is not enough to redesign algorithms while leaving people insecure, unheard, and politically powerless.

Life-coherent repair must work across relations, knowledge, institutions, material conditions, and meaning.

The first pathway is **re-humanizing contact**. People need structured opportunities to encounter one another outside performative conflict. This does not mean forced harmony or denial of injustice. It means creating contexts where persons can tell the truth about their fears, needs, losses, responsibilities, and hopes without immediately being converted into enemies. Local assemblies, community dialogues, restorative processes, interfaith work, youth exchanges, cooperative projects, and shared service can help rebuild relational perception.

The second pathway is **shared problem-solving**. Polarization weakens when people work together on concrete life-ground issues: water, schools, housing, disaster preparedness, food security, public safety, elder care, youth opportunity, environmental restoration, and local health. Shared work does not erase ideological difference, but it can restore the experience of common fate. When people repair a watershed, school, clinic, neighborhood, or emergency plan together, politics becomes embodied in common care.

The third pathway is **deliberative participation**. Citizens' assemblies, deliberative polls, participatory budgeting, community juries, local planning forums, and other structured processes can help ordinary people learn, deliberate, and recommend action on complex issues. These processes are not replacements for representative democracy, but they can complement it by slowing judgment, diversifying voice, reducing elite capture, and allowing people to encounter complexity outside campaign warfare.

The fourth pathway is **truthful conflict naming**. Participatory repair does not suppress real disagreement. It helps people distinguish disagreement from dehumanization, grievance from scapegoating, accountability from revenge, identity from domination, and safety from control.

Some conflicts are rooted in real injustice and must not be dissolved into false equivalence. Life-coherent politics must be able to say: this harm is real, this fear is real, this history matters, this structure must change, and this person still belongs within the domain of human legitimacy.

The fifth pathway is **institutional redesign**. Polarization is not only psychological. Institutions can inflame or moderate it. Electoral systems, districting, campaign finance, legislative procedures, media regulation, platform accountability, civic education, local governance, and public consultation processes shape whether political actors gain from repair or from division. Life-coherent politics must redesign incentives so that truthfulness, coalition-building, responsiveness, and long-term problem-solving are rewarded.

The sixth pathway is **economic and regional repair**. Communities that experience abandonment, humiliation, or loss of future possibility become vulnerable to polarizing narratives. Participatory repair must therefore include investment in livelihoods, infrastructure, education, health, ecological restoration, cultural continuity, and local agency. People need more than symbolic recognition. They need viable futures.

The seventh pathway is **epistemic rebuilding**. Trustworthy local journalism, public-interest media, civic education, science communication, open data, community research, libraries, and transparent institutions are essential. People need places where shared reality can be rebuilt patiently. This is especially important at local and regional scales, where people can verify reality through lived experience and direct relationship.

The eighth pathway is **care for attention and emotion**. Polarization is embodied. It lives in nervous systems shaped by fear, anger, shame, grief, and exhaustion. Political repair must recognize the emotional ecology of public life. Constant outrage damages judgment. Humiliation generates defensiveness. Fear narrows perception. Grief unacknowledged becomes resentment. A life-coherent politics must create spaces where public emotion can be metabolized rather than exploited.

The ninth pathway is **shared civic rituals**. Societies need ways to remember, mourn, celebrate, apologize, repair, and recommit. Ritual is not decorative. It gives form to collective meaning. Public memorials, days of service, truth-telling ceremonies, ecological restoration events, civic oaths, intergenerational gatherings, and cultural festivals can help reweave belonging when grounded in honesty rather than propaganda.

The tenth pathway is **protection against domination**. Participatory repair must not become pressure on the harmed to reconcile without justice. Those who have suffered violence, exclusion, racism, ecological loss, gender domination, or institutional betrayal should not be asked to provide emotional comfort to those who benefited from the harm. Repair requires truth, accountability, restitution, and change. Reconciliation without transformation is pacification.

The life-coherent alternative to polarization is therefore not consensus. It is **coexistence with repair**.

A life-coherent polity does not require everyone to think alike. It requires that differences remain within a shared commitment to the life-ground: no group may seek its flourishing through the destruction, humiliation, abandonment, or disposability of others. No faction may destroy shared reality for advantage. No party may consume the future for victory. No identity may claim dignity by denying the dignity of others. No institution may demand loyalty while refusing correction.

Participatory repair asks politics to become a practice of re-entering shared worldhood.

It begins locally, because people often recover trust through concrete experience before abstract persuasion. But it must also scale institutionally, because local goodwill cannot overcome national or global systems that reward division. Life-coherent politics needs both: face-to-face repair and structural redesign.

The practical question becomes:

What would allow people who disagree to participate together in protecting the conditions of life?

This question changes the field.

It does not ask people to abandon conviction.

It asks them to locate conviction within responsibility.

It does not ask communities to forget harm.

It asks them to transform harm into repair.

It does not ask citizens to trust blindly.

It asks institutions to become trustworthy.

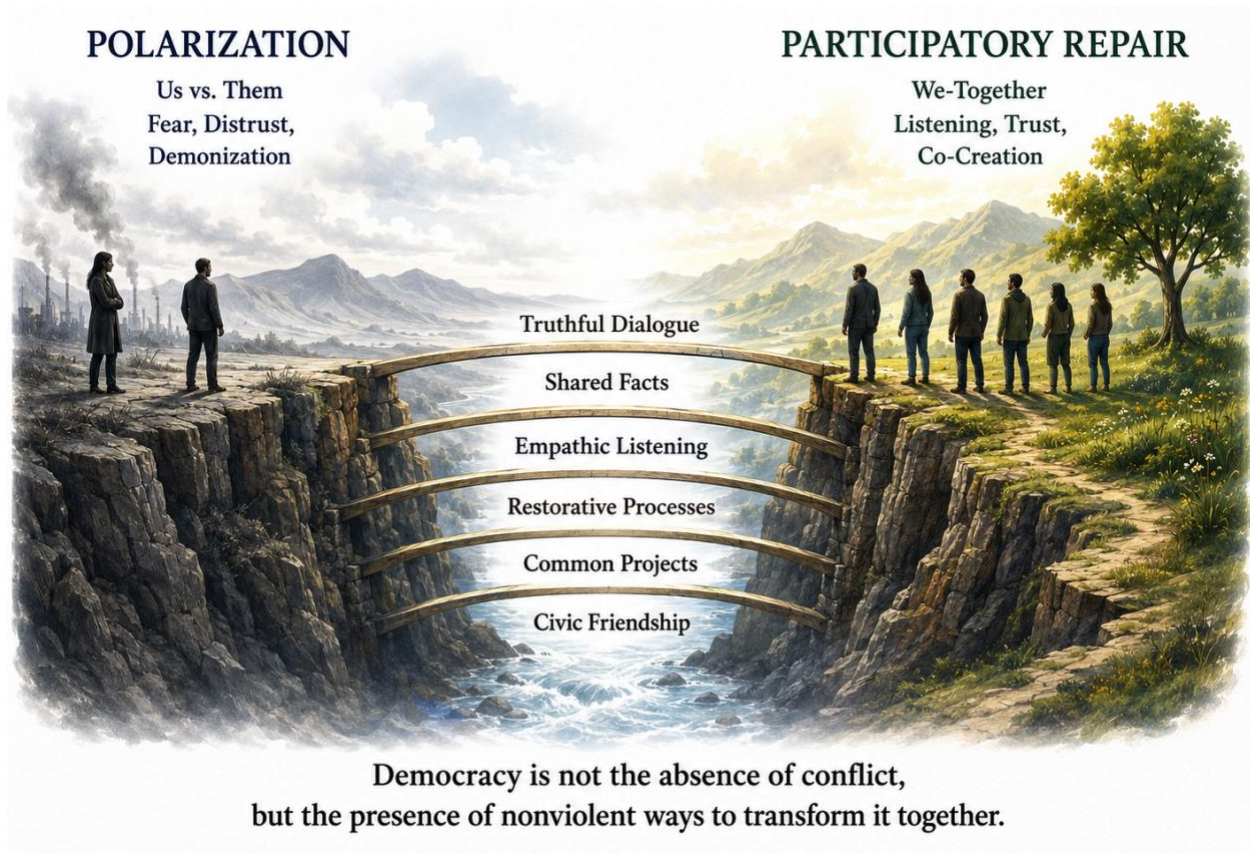
It does not ask opponents to disappear.

It asks them to become accountable co-inhabitants of a shared world.

Polarization says: the future requires the defeat of the other.

Life-coherent politics says: the future requires the repair of the conditions under which difference can remain livable.

That repair is not sentimental. It is civilizational work.



**Figure 7. From Polarization to Participatory Repair.** Polarization becomes life-destructive when disagreement turns into mutual world-denial. Participatory repair rebuilds shared reality, trust, and civic agency through truth, accountability, material repair, and common work on life-ground conditions.

For participatory repair to endure, it must be supported by legal and constitutional forms that protect rights, restrain domination, secure the commons, and make sovereignty answerable to the life-ground.

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## Part V. Law, Sovereignty, Applications, and Assessment

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### 18. Law, Rights, Sovereignty, and Constitutional Life-Guardianship

Life-coherent politics must clarify its relationship to law. Without law, political commitments may remain aspirational. Without rights, persons and communities may remain vulnerable to arbitrary power. Without constitutional limits, authority may claim to serve life while concentrating domination. Without institutions of accountability, the life-ground may be invoked rhetorically while being degraded materially.

Yet law itself is not automatically life-coherent.

Law can protect life, or it can authorize harm. It can secure rights, or it can formalize exclusion. It can restrain power, or it can shield power from accountability. It can protect the commons, or it can enclose them. It can repair historical violence, or it can preserve it under procedural legitimacy. It can recognize persons as rights-bearing participants, or it can reduce them to cases, categories, risks, migrants, consumers, workers, patients, or administrative burdens.

A life-coherent politics therefore does not treat law as sacred because it is law. It asks whether law remains answerable to the life-ground.

#### 18.1 Rights as Life-Capacity Protections

Rights are among the most important political achievements of modernity (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966a, 1966b). Civil and political rights protect persons from arbitrary power, censorship, unlawful detention, violence, discrimination, and exclusion from public life. Economic, social, and cultural rights recognize that freedom requires material and social conditions: health, education, food, water, housing, work, social security, and cultural participation. Environmental rights increasingly recognize that a healthy environment is not optional, but foundational to life and dignity (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021; United Nations General Assembly, 2022).

Life-coherent politics affirms rights, but interprets them through life-capacity.

A right is not merely a legal claim. It is a protection for a condition of life, participation, dignity, development, or non-domination. Freedom of speech protects the epistemic commons and the capacity to participate in shared reality. The right to health protects embodied participation. The right to education protects developmental and civic capacity. The right to water protects the biological life-ground. The right to housing protects dwelling, family life, safety, and belonging. The right to a healthy environment protects present and future life.

This interpretation helps overcome the false opposition between “negative” and “positive” rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966a, 1966b; Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Freedom from state repression and freedom to access life necessities are not rival ideals. They are mutually dependent. A person who is free from censorship but too hungry, sick, displaced, or uneducated to participate is not fully free. A person who receives public services but cannot dissent, organize, or challenge authority is not fully free. Life-coherent politics requires both protection from domination and access to the conditions of life-capacity.

Rights become life-incoherent when they are abstracted from the conditions that make them real. Formal equality without material access can mask structural violence. Property rights without ecological duties can authorize life-ground destruction. Freedom of contract without bargaining power can legitimate exploitation. Free speech without epistemic accountability can be weaponized into manipulation, incitement, or manufactured ignorance. Security rights without non-domination can justify permanent surveillance and coercion.

Life-coherent rights therefore require relational interpretation. The question is not only, “What claim does this person or institution possess?” The deeper question is, “How does this right protect life-capacity while remaining compatible with the life-capacity of others, the commons, and future generations?”

## 18.2 Constitutionalism as Life-Ground Protection

A constitution is more than a legal document. It is a society’s formal architecture of political memory, authority, restraint, aspiration, and belonging. It defines who may govern, how power is limited, what rights are protected, how institutions relate, and what the political community holds as fundamental.

Life-coherent constitutionalism asks whether the constitution protects the life-ground (McMurtry, 2011; United Nations General Assembly, 2022).

Traditional constitutionalism rightly emphasizes rule of law, separation of powers, rights, due process, judicial independence, representation, and limits on arbitrary authority. These remain essential. But in an age of ecological breakdown, social fragmentation, technological power, and intergenerational risk, constitutionalism must also protect the conditions that make constitutional life possible.

A life-coherent constitution would recognize that democracy cannot survive without public health, education, ecological stability, civic trust, public knowledge, institutional accountability, and non-dominated participation. It would understand that future generations are constitutional stakeholders, even though they cannot vote. It would treat the civil commons not as optional policy terrain, but as the infrastructure of substantive freedom.

This does not mean that every policy detail belongs in a constitution. Over-constitutionalization can make democratic adaptation difficult. But constitutional orders can establish life-ground duties: duties to protect ecological systems, prevent discrimination, secure basic necessities,

maintain public institutions, ensure access to information, protect future generations, uphold public participation, and prevent the capture of the state by private power.

Life-coherent constitutionalism therefore introduces the idea of **constitutional life-guardianship**.

Constitutional life-guardianship means that public authority is entrusted with protecting the basic conditions by which the political community can remain alive, free, participatory, ecologically grounded, and future-capable. It reframes constitutional duty as more than the prevention of tyranny. It includes the prevention of life-ground degradation.

### 18.3 Law as Repair, Not Merely Control

Much law is organized around control: prohibitions, permissions, penalties, contracts, procedures, enforcement, liability, jurisdiction, and compliance. These are necessary. But a life-coherent legal order must also ask whether law repairs the field.

A legal system that punishes crime without addressing the conditions that produce violence remains partial (Galtung, 1969, 1990). A housing law that regulates eviction without addressing housing insecurity remains partial. An environmental law that permits damage within technical limits without restoring ecosystems remains partial. A health law that defines entitlements without ensuring access remains partial. A public-administration law that provides procedures without dignity remains partial.

Life-coherent law asks:

Does this legal arrangement reduce domination?

Does it protect necessities?

Does it regenerate commons?

Does it repair harm?

Does it preserve future life?

Does it hear affected communities?

Does it correct power?

Does it prevent recurrence?

This has implications across legal domains. Criminal justice must become more restorative and preventive. Environmental law must become more precautionary and regenerative.

Administrative law must become more dignity-preserving and accessible. Property law must incorporate ecological and social duties. Labor law must protect the dignity of workers and the

time of life. Health law must connect rights to actual care. Technology law must protect attention, privacy, and agency. Fiscal law must account for intergenerational burdens.

Law becomes life-coherent when it does not merely command behavior but restores conditions of viable coexistence.

## 18.4 Sovereignty as Responsibility to the Life-Ground

Sovereignty is often understood as supreme authority within a territory and independence from external domination. For colonized, formerly colonized, small, and vulnerable nations, sovereignty is not an abstraction. It is bound up with dignity, self-determination, cultural survival, development, and protection from external control.

Life-coherent politics affirms the importance of sovereignty, especially for communities historically subjected to empire, extraction, dependency, and externally imposed policy. A people must have meaningful authority to shape the conditions of its own life.

Yet sovereignty cannot mean the unlimited right to destroy the life-ground. No state has legitimate authority to poison its waters, destroy its ecosystems, abandon its vulnerable, silence its people, erase minorities, or consume the future. Sovereignty is not ownership of life. It is stewardship of a shared life-field.

Life-coherent sovereignty therefore means **responsible self-determination within ecological and human interdependence** (United Nations General Assembly, 1966a, 1966b; Rockström et al., 2009; Richardson et al., 2023).

This is especially important in a planetary age. Climate change, pandemics, ocean degradation, financial instability, migration, digital platforms, supply chains, biodiversity loss, and atmospheric pollution do not respect borders. No state can be fully life-coherent alone. The life-ground is local, national, regional, and planetary at once.

A life-coherent politics therefore redefines sovereignty as accountable participation in nested systems of responsibility.

At the local level, communities require agency over the conditions that directly shape their lives.

At the national level, states must protect rights, commons, institutions, and ecological conditions.

At the regional level, neighboring societies must cooperate on shared waters, migration, health, trade, disaster response, climate adaptation, food systems, and security.

At the planetary level, states and institutions must protect Earth-system conditions required for future life.

Sovereignty remains real, but it becomes life-bounded. Its legitimacy depends on whether it protects the life-capacity of its people while honoring obligations to others, ecosystems, and future generations.

## 18.5 Subsidiarity and Nested Governance

Life-coherent politics requires decisions to be made at the scale most capable of perceiving, protecting, and repairing the life-field affected.

This is the principle of subsidiarity, interpreted through life-coherence.

Where local knowledge, direct participation, and community stewardship are essential, authority should not be unnecessarily centralized. Communities often understand their watersheds, schools, health needs, cultural practices, safety concerns, food systems, and vulnerabilities better than distant administrations. Local governance can preserve relational intelligence that centralized systems miss.

But localism alone is insufficient. Some problems exceed local capacity. Climate change, pandemics, national health systems, public finance, human rights, migration, disaster risk, biodiversity, digital platforms, and infrastructure require coordination beyond the local. Higher levels of governance are necessary when the scale of harm, resource, or responsibility exceeds local ability.

Life-coherent subsidiarity therefore does not mean “local always.” It means **the right relationship among scales**.

A life-coherent governance system asks:

What must be decided locally because life is directly experienced there?

What must be coordinated nationally because rights, resources, and institutions require shared standards?

What must be governed regionally because ecosystems, economies, cultures, and risks cross borders?

What must be governed globally because the life-ground itself is planetary?

Nested governance is the institutional form of this answer (Ostrom, 1990). It allows local participation, national obligation, regional cooperation, and global responsibility to reinforce rather than undermine one another.

## 18.6 The Rule of Law and the Rule of Life

The rule of law is indispensable. Without it, power becomes arbitrary, rights become insecure, corruption spreads, and persons become vulnerable to domination. Life-coherent politics does not weaken the rule of law. It deepens it.

But the rule of law must remain answerable to the rule of life.

The rule of life does not mean biological reductionism or the abandonment of legal order. It means that legal systems are legitimate only insofar as they protect the conditions by which living beings can continue, develop, belong, participate, and flourish. Law is a means, not an ultimate end. Its authority derives from its service to justice, dignity, peace, commons, ecological continuity, and life-capacity.

When the rule of law is severed from the rule of life, legality can become a mask for violence (McMurtry, 2011; Galtung, 1969). Apartheid had laws. Colonial extraction had laws. Slavery had laws. Exclusionary property regimes had laws. Environmental destruction may be licensed by law. Administrative abandonment may follow legal procedure. Dispossession may be recorded in proper form.

Life-coherent politics therefore asks law to justify itself before life.

This does not authorize arbitrary disregard for law whenever someone claims a higher good. That would endanger democratic order. Rather, it means that legal systems must contain pathways for correction: rights litigation, constitutional review, democratic reform, public reason, civil disobedience under conditions of conscience, institutional accountability, participatory law-making, and international human-rights norms.

A mature legal order must be stable enough to prevent arbitrary power and flexible enough to correct life-destroying legality.

## 18.7 Civil Disobedience and Life-Ground Conscience

There are moments when law and life diverge. A legal order may authorize injustice, ecological destruction, exclusion, war, or administrative cruelty. In such moments, citizens and communities may appeal to a deeper political conscience.

Civil disobedience becomes life-coherent when it is oriented not toward private advantage or nihilistic disruption, but toward restoring public accountability to the life-ground. It names a harm that ordinary institutions have failed to hear. It accepts the seriousness of law while exposing the failure of legality to protect life, dignity, commons, or future generations.

Life-coherent civil disobedience should be disciplined by several questions:

Is the harm serious and life-relevant?

Have ordinary channels of correction been attempted or shown to be inadequate?

Is the action proportionate?

Does it avoid unnecessary harm to persons?

Does it clarify rather than obscure the issue?

Does it invite public reasoning?

Does it seek repair rather than domination?

Does it remain accountable to those most affected?

This gives civil disobedience a place within life-coherent politics without romanticizing disruption. It recognizes that democratic life sometimes requires principled interruption when institutions become unable or unwilling to perceive harm.

## 18.8 Toward Jurisdictions of Life-Coherence

A life-coherent political order would gradually build what may be called **jurisdictions of life-coherence**: legal and institutional spaces in which authority is explicitly accountable to life-capacity.

These may include:

- Constitutional environmental rights
- Rights to health, education, water, food, housing, and social protection
- Legal duties to future generations
- Public-trust doctrines for ecological systems
- Rights of nature or ecological guardianship models where appropriate
- Participatory budgeting and local democratic law-making
- Ombuds offices for administrative harm
- Climate accountability laws
- Health-in-all-policies legislation
- Care-economy protections
- Public-interest technology regulation
- Anti-corruption and transparency frameworks
- Community land trusts and commons-based legal forms
- Restorative and transformative justice institutions
- Legal protections for whistleblowers, journalists, scientists, and public-interest knowledge

These are not all the same kind of legal instrument. Some are rights, some are duties, some are institutions, some are procedures, some are ownership forms, and some are accountability

mechanisms. What unites them is their orientation: they make power answerable to the conditions of life.

The ultimate legal question of life-coherent politics is therefore not simply:

Is this lawful?

The deeper question is:

Does this legal order conserve the conditions by which life can continue with dignity, participation, justice, ecological fit, and future possibility?

Law becomes life-coherent when it protects the vulnerable, restrains domination, regenerates commons, secures necessities, hears affected life, preserves future generations, and repairs harm (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966a, 1966b, 2022).

Sovereignty becomes life-coherent when it becomes stewardship.

Rights become life-coherent when they protect real capacities.

Constitutionalism becomes life-coherent when it guards the life-ground.

And the rule of law becomes most legitimate when it serves the rule of life.

*Law, Rights, Sovereignty, and the Protection of the Life-Ground*



**Figure 8. Constitutional Life-Guardianship.** Life-coherent law and constitutionalism protect rights as life-capacity conditions, restrain domination, secure the civil and ecological commons, represent future generations, and redefine sovereignty as stewardship of the life-ground across nested scales of responsibility.

These legal and constitutional commitments become concrete only when applied to the domains where life is actually secured or suppressed: health, climate, food, water, education, housing, migration, and digital life.

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## 19. Applications: Health, Climate, Food, Water, Education, Housing, Migration, and Digital Life

Life-coherent politics must be more than a general philosophy. It must be able to illuminate concrete domains of governance. Its value lies in whether it helps societies perceive harm more clearly, design institutions more wisely, preserve the life-ground more faithfully, and repair conditions that suppress life-capacity.

This section applies the framework to eight interdependent domains: health, climate, food, water, education, housing, migration, and digital life. These domains are not exhaustive, but they disclose the wider grammar (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Raworth, 2017; McMurtry, 2011). Each is a site where politics either conserves life or demands sacrifice from it. Each reveals the same diagnostic questions: what necessities are at stake, what margins are being consumed, what forms of violence are normalized, what commons are degraded or regenerated, who participates, and what repair is owed?

### 19.1 Health

Health is not merely a service sector. It is the embodied basis of political participation (World Health Organization, 2023). A person who cannot breathe safely, obtain care, manage chronic illness, recover from trauma, access medicines, receive maternal support, or live free from preventable disease is not fully able to participate in the worlds that claim their consent.

Life-coherent politics therefore treats health as a civil commons.

This requires moving beyond the narrow equation of health with clinical treatment. Clinical care is indispensable, but health is produced across the whole life-field: housing, food, water, air, work, income, education, social belonging, childhood development, ecological conditions, violence exposure, gender relations, culture, and public trust. A politics that funds hospitals while tolerating poverty, pollution, unsafe housing, food insecurity, loneliness, and care depletion is treating downstream consequences while preserving upstream causes.

Life-coherent health politics asks:

Are people able to meet the bodily, emotional, social, and ecological conditions of health?

Are health systems organized around care, prevention, continuity, dignity, and equity, or around throughput, billing, crisis response, and institutional convenience?

Are public-health systems sufficiently trusted, funded, locally connected, and able to detect harm early?

Are caregivers protected, or are they being consumed as hidden margins?

Are the social determinants of health being treated as political responsibilities?

A life-coherent health system would strengthen primary care, public health, mental health, prevention, community health, environmental health, maternal and child health, elder care, disability inclusion, palliative care, and the relational continuity of healing. It would not reduce patients to cases or health workers to units of productivity. It would understand illness as both embodied and field-related.

Health is also where structural violence becomes measurable in bodies. Unequal exposure to pollution, food insecurity, stress, unsafe labor, poor housing, and inadequate care becomes unequal morbidity and mortality. Life-coherent politics refuses to call these differences natural. It asks what political arrangements are being written into flesh.

The life-coherent aim is not only longer life, but fuller life-capacity: the ability to live, care, learn, work, participate, recover, and belong.

## 19.2 Climate

Climate change is not simply an environmental issue. It is a life-ground issue (World Health Organization, 2023; Richardson et al., 2023). It alters heat, water, storms, disease patterns, food security, migration pressures, infrastructure risk, mental health, coastal viability, biodiversity, and the conditions of intergenerational justice. It reveals the inseparability of ecological limits and political legitimacy.

Life-coherent climate politics begins with three recognitions.

First, the atmosphere is a commons. Its destabilization is not merely a technical failure, but a failure of political accountability across generations and borders.

Second, climate harm is unequal. Those least responsible for emissions often face the greatest exposure and have the least margin for adaptation. This is especially evident in small island developing states, coastal communities, Indigenous territories, low-income households, children, elders, outdoor workers, and communities already burdened by historical injustice.

Third, mitigation and adaptation must be held together. Reducing emissions is necessary, but not sufficient. Communities are already living with climate impacts. Adaptation must protect life now while mitigation protects future life.

A life-coherent climate politics rejects both denial and unjust transition. Denial sacrifices the future to preserve present systems. Unjust transition sacrifices vulnerable communities in the name of ecological responsibility. Life-coherence requires a just transition: rapid decarbonization, ecological restoration, disaster preparedness, resilient infrastructure, food and water security, health-system adaptation, community participation, and protection of livelihoods.

Climate policy must therefore be tested by several questions:

Does it reduce emissions fast enough to protect future life?

Does it increase or decrease inequality?

Does it protect those most exposed to heat, storms, drought, flooding, disease, and displacement?

Does it regenerate ecosystems or merely shift extraction elsewhere?

Does it preserve local culture and agency?

Does it create dignified transition pathways for workers and communities?

Does it build resilience without turning resilience into a command for the vulnerable to endure more harm?

For small islands and coastal communities, climate politics is existential. Sea-level rise, coastal erosion, coral reef decline, changing rainfall, hurricane intensification, saltwater intrusion, insurance retreat, tourism vulnerability, and food import dependence are not abstract risks. They are direct pressures on the continuity of place. A life-coherent politics must therefore defend climate justice as a matter of shared planetary responsibility and local survival.

### 19.3 Food

Food is a life necessity, cultural practice, ecological relation, economic sector, and political commons (FAO et al., 2024). A food system is life-coherent when it nourishes people, supports dignified livelihoods, regenerates soil and water, protects biodiversity, preserves cultural foodways, and remains resilient under disturbance.

A food system is life-incoherent when hunger, malnutrition, obesity, farmer precarity, ecological degradation, food waste, corporate concentration, and dependency coexist with apparent market abundance.

Life-coherent food politics asks not only whether calories are available, but whether people can access healthy, culturally appropriate, affordable, ecologically sustainable food. It asks whether farmers, fishers, food workers, caregivers, and communities have real agency in the food system. It asks whether the system builds resilience or dependency.

Food insecurity is not only a technical supply problem. It often reflects poverty, land policy, trade dependency, climate shocks, conflict, debt, market concentration, weak social protection, poor nutrition education, and the erosion of local production. A life-coherent approach must therefore integrate agriculture, fisheries, nutrition, public health, school feeding, land use, climate adaptation, biodiversity, social protection, and local livelihoods.

The life-coherent food system would support agroecology, regenerative agriculture, sustainable fisheries, local and regional food capacity, school meals, nutrition-sensitive social protection, seed diversity, water stewardship, fair labor, and protection against predatory concentration.

It would also recognize food as relational. Meals are not only nutrient delivery. They are family, culture, memory, celebration, care, hospitality, and belonging. Politics becomes life-blind when it reduces food to commodity throughput while ignoring nourishment, culture, ecology, and care.

The life-coherent question is simple:

Does the food system feed life, or does it extract from land, labor, bodies, and future generations while producing profit and waste?

## 19.4 Water

Water is the most immediate life-ground necessity (United Nations General Assembly, 2010; United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2003). Without safe, sufficient, accessible, affordable, and acceptable water, no political right can be meaningfully exercised. Sanitation is equally foundational because dignity, health, gender safety, childhood development, and ecological protection depend on it.

Life-coherent politics treats water as a commons and a right, not merely a utility or commodity.

This does not mean that water systems require no financing, management, pricing, engineering, or regulation. It means that water governance must remain answerable to life before profit, convenience, or political advantage. Water systems must protect watersheds, infrastructure, public health, affordability, continuity of access, cultural relationships, and future availability.

A life-coherent water politics asks:

Is water safe?

Is it accessible to all households, schools, health facilities, farms, and communities?

Is sanitation dignified and protective of health?

Are watersheds being protected from pollution, overuse, and ecological degradation?

Are water utilities accountable and financially sustainable without excluding the poor?

Are communities involved in water governance?

Are climate risks being incorporated into planning?

Are future generations being protected from depletion, contamination, and infrastructural neglect?

Water reveals the unity of ecological and social politics. Contaminated water becomes disease. Depleted watersheds become conflict. Inadequate sanitation becomes gendered insecurity and

childhood illness. Unaffordable access becomes structural violence. Climate change intensifies the problem through drought, flood, saltwater intrusion, storm damage, and changing rainfall.

A life-coherent society protects water before it becomes crisis.

## 19.5 Education

Education is the formation of world-participating persons (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). It is not merely the preparation of workers, the delivery of curriculum, or the production of test results. It is the civil commons through which a society renews its capacity to perceive, judge, care, create, deliberate, and repair.

A life-coherent education system develops more than employability. It develops literacy, numeracy, scientific reasoning, ecological awareness, historical memory, ethical judgment, emotional maturity, civic agency, cultural imagination, digital discernment, and the capacity to live with others in a shared world.

Education becomes life-incoherent when it is narrowed to competition, credentialism, test performance, workforce sorting, or ideological control. It becomes life-incoherent when children are trained for economic systems that are themselves ecologically and socially incoherent. It becomes life-incoherent when schools discipline the symptoms of poverty, trauma, hunger, disability, and exclusion without repairing the conditions that shape learning.

Life-coherent education asks:

Are children nourished, safe, rested, cared for, and emotionally supported enough to learn?

Do schools cultivate curiosity, judgment, cooperation, ecological responsibility, and civic courage?

Are teachers respected as knowledge-and-care workers?

Does education include history truthfully, including histories of domination and repair?

Does it prepare students to participate in democracy, not merely compete in markets?

Does it include local knowledge, culture, land, sea, community memory, and practical life skills?

Does it build the capacity to discern truth in digital environments?

Education is also intergenerational politics. The worlds children learn to imagine become the worlds they may later conserve or transform. A life-coherent politics therefore treats education as one of the highest forms of future guardianship.

## 19.6 Housing

Housing is not merely a private good or real-estate asset (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966b). It is a life necessity, health determinant, family container, site of memory, condition of safety, and base of political participation. To lack adequate housing is to lack a stable foothold in the world.

A life-coherent housing politics begins from the right to dwell securely and with dignity. Adequate housing means more than a roof. It requires habitability, affordability, accessibility, security of tenure, services, location, cultural adequacy, protection from hazards, and connection to community life.

Housing becomes life-incoherent when shelter is subordinated to speculation. When homes become primarily vehicles for asset accumulation, short-term rental extraction, land banking, or financialized investment, the life function of housing is displaced. People may then be forced into overcrowding, homelessness, long commutes, unsafe buildings, displacement, or permanent insecurity.

Life-coherent housing asks:

Can people live securely near work, school, care, community, transport, and ecological safety?

Are children able to grow in stable homes?

Are elders and disabled persons able to dwell with dignity?

Are communities protected from displacement?

Is land use supporting ecological resilience?

Are housing markets governed so that shelter remains answerable to life need?

Is public, cooperative, community, or nonprofit housing available where markets fail?

Housing also connects to climate. Coastal settlements face erosion and storms. Poorly built housing magnifies disaster. Heat stress rises in inadequate buildings. Energy poverty affects health. Life-coherent housing policy must therefore integrate affordability, safety, climate adaptation, energy efficiency, community continuity, and land justice.

The political question is not only how many units are built. It is what kinds of dwelling worlds are conserved.

## 19.7 Migration

Migration is one of the most morally revealing domains of politics (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). It exposes the limits of national belonging, the unequal distribution of safety,

the violence of borders, the effects of conflict and climate disruption, and the human search for viable life.

Life-coherent politics begins from the recognition that migrants are not flows, burdens, threats, or abstractions. They are persons, families, workers, children, elders, communities, and bearers of history. They move for many reasons: safety, work, education, family, climate stress, violence, persecution, ecological degradation, aspiration, and survival.

Migration policy becomes life-incoherent when it treats movement primarily through fear, exclusion, exploitation, or political spectacle. It becomes incoherent when borders protect comfort while abandoning those displaced by systems to which receiving societies may be historically or economically linked. It becomes incoherent when migrant labor is welcomed but migrant dignity is denied. It becomes incoherent when people are forced to move because their home conditions have been made unviable, then punished for moving.

A life-coherent migration politics asks:

Why are people moving?

What conditions made staying unviable?

What obligations exist across borders, histories, economies, climates, and conflicts?

How can receiving communities be supported so that solidarity does not become local strain?

How can migrants' rights, dignity, family unity, labor protections, health care, education, and participation be secured?

How can migration be governed without dehumanization?

How can adaptation, development, peacebuilding, and ecological repair reduce forced displacement?

Life-coherent migration policy must hold several truths together. Borders are politically real. Communities need planning, resources, and social trust. Rapid migration can create strain if unsupported. But none of this justifies cruelty, scapegoating, indefinite detention, family separation, labor exploitation, or the denial of basic human dignity.

The deeper life-coherent aim is to expand viable options: the option to stay in dignity, the option to move safely when necessary, and the option to belong where one lives.

## 19.8 Digital Life

Digital systems now shape perception, attention, work, education, commerce, politics, intimacy, memory, surveillance, identity, and public discourse (Maturana, 1988; McMurtry, 2011). They are not merely tools. They are environments in which life is increasingly organized.

Life-coherent politics therefore treats digital life as a domain of civil-commons governance.

Digital systems can expand life-capacity. They can improve access to knowledge, health information, education, public services, democratic participation, community connection, emergency communication, assistive technologies, and creative expression. They can help small places connect to wider worlds.

But digital systems can also suppress life-capacity. They can capture attention, manipulate behavior, intensify polarization, spread misinformation, exploit data, weaken privacy, automate discrimination, expose children to harm, displace workers, concentrate corporate power, and convert human relation into monetized engagement.

A life-coherent digital politics asks:

Does this technology expand real options or narrow them?

Does it protect attention, privacy, dignity, and autonomy?

Does it strengthen or fragment shared reality?

Does it support children's development?

Does it increase democratic accountability or concentrate invisible power?

Can affected people contest automated decisions?

Are algorithms auditable where they affect rights, opportunities, health, finance, education, policing, employment, or political communication?

Does digital infrastructure serve the public interest, or does it enclose the epistemic commons?

Artificial intelligence intensifies these questions. AI systems can support diagnosis, translation, accessibility, research, planning, education, and environmental monitoring. They can also produce bias, surveillance, deskilling, manipulation, misinformation, dependency, and unaccountable decision-making. Life-coherent AI governance must therefore be transparent, contestable, human-rights grounded, ecologically aware, democratically accountable, and designed around life-capacity rather than extraction.

Digital life also raises the question of attention as a commons. A society whose attention is continuously harvested loses democratic margin. Children, citizens, workers, and communities need protected spaces for thought, rest, conversation, learning, memory, and relationship. Digital freedom cannot mean the freedom of systems to colonize human attention.

A life-coherent digital politics does not reject technology. It asks technology to justify itself before life.

Across these domains, the same question recurs: how can policy-makers, institutions, and citizens test whether power is conserving the conditions of life or merely preserving the systems that consume it?

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## 20. The Life-Coherence Test for Policy and Power

A political framework becomes useful only when it can guide judgment. Life-coherent politics therefore requires a practical test: a way to evaluate policies, institutions, budgets, technologies, laws, political movements, development plans, and exercises of authority.

The Life-Coherence Test asks whether a political action conserves, repairs, or expands shared life-capacity under real constraints and within ecological limits (McMurtry, 2011; Raworth, 2017; Richardson et al., 2023).

It can be organized as a sequence of twelve questions.

### 20.1 The Life-Ground Question

What conditions of life are at stake?

This question identifies the biological, ecological, social, cultural, and institutional conditions affected by the decision. It asks whether air, water, food, shelter, health, care, safety, education, belonging, ecological stability, public trust, or future viability are implicated.

No political decision is life-neutral. Every decision touches some layer of the life-field.

### 20.2 The Necessity Question

Whose life necessities are protected, neglected, enclosed, or sacrificed?

This question distinguishes needs from preferences and luxuries. It asks whether people can access what they require to live and participate. It also asks whose necessities are being made conditional on ability to pay, political status, geography, identity, or institutional convenience.

A policy that protects nonessential accumulation while denying necessities is life-incoherent.

### 20.3 The Violence Question

What forms of direct, structural, cultural, ecological, epistemic, administrative, or economic violence are reduced or intensified?

This question makes hidden harm visible. It asks whether the decision wounds bodies, suppresses capacities, legitimizes domination, degrades ecosystems, silences knowledge, humiliates persons, or transfers burden onto the vulnerable.

A policy that reduces visible disorder while increasing structural harm is not life-coherent.

## 20.4 The Commons Question

What civil, ecological, knowledge, care, or democratic commons are regenerated or degraded?

This question asks whether shared life-support systems are protected. It includes public health, education, water, sanitation, ecological systems, care infrastructure, public knowledge, democratic trust, and institutions of accountability.

A policy that privatizes gain while socializing harm weakens the commons.

## 20.5 The Participation Question

Who participates in shaping the decision, and whose knowledge is missing?

This question evaluates whether affected persons and communities have meaningful influence. It asks whether lived experience, scientific evidence, local knowledge, historical memory, professional expertise, and future-generation interests are included.

Consultation is not enough if it does not change the decision field.

## 20.6 The Margin Question

What margins are preserved, consumed, or restored?

This question examines resilience. It asks whether the decision protects ecological buffers, public trust, household security, fiscal space, care capacity, institutional legitimacy, worker well-being, time, diversity, and redundancy.

A policy that maximizes efficiency by consuming margin creates future fragility.

## 20.7 The Options Question

What real options are expanded or foreclosed?

This question distinguishes formal freedom from lived possibility. It asks whether people gain viable pathways to live, learn, care, work, heal, participate, remain rooted, move safely, dissent, and adapt.

An option is not life-coherent if it depends on exploitation, ecological degradation, or the displacement of harm.

## 20.8 The Ecological Boundary Question

Does the decision remain within ecological limits and protect future life?

This question asks whether the decision respects climate, biodiversity, water, soil, land, ocean, pollution, and material limits. It also asks whether ecological costs are shifted across borders or generations.

No policy that destroys the life-ground can be politically coherent.

## 20.9 The Time-Horizon Question

Who benefits now, who pays later, and what future possibilities are being preserved or foreclosed?

This question counters short-termism. It asks whether the decision burdens children, future generations, ecosystems, public debt, infrastructure, or social trust.

Life-coherent politics must represent those who cannot yet appear in the room.

## 20.10 The Repair Question

If harm is produced or inherited, what repair is built into the decision?

This question asks whether compensation, restoration, care, restitution, institutional reform, monitoring, healing, or ecological regeneration are included. It refuses the normalization of sacrifice without repair.

A policy that imposes harm without repair teaches abandonment.

## 20.11 The Power Question

Who gains power, who loses power, and how is power made accountable?

This question examines domination, capture, concentration, surveillance, corruption, and exclusion. It asks whether the decision strengthens democratic accountability or creates unaccountable control.

Power is life-coherent only when it remains answerable to affected life.

## 20.12 The World-Conservation Question

What kind of world does this decision conserve?

This final question integrates the others. It asks what forms of relationship, value, meaning, economy, ecology, authority, and participation are stabilized by the decision. Does it conserve a world of care, dignity, truth, reciprocity, ecological fit, and democratic repair? Or does it conserve a world of extraction, suspicion, abandonment, enclosure, domination, and future sacrifice?

This is the deepest political question.

The Life-Coherence Test can be used at multiple scales. A community can apply it to a local development proposal. A ministry can apply it to a policy reform. A parliament can apply it to legislation. A court can use it to interpret rights. A civil-society organization can use it to evaluate government action. A school can apply it to institutional rules. A health system can apply it to service design. A climate planner can use it to assess adaptation. A technology regulator can apply it to digital platforms and AI systems.

The test is not a mechanical formula. It is a disciplined field of questioning. It does not eliminate political judgment. It improves judgment by forcing power to answer to life.

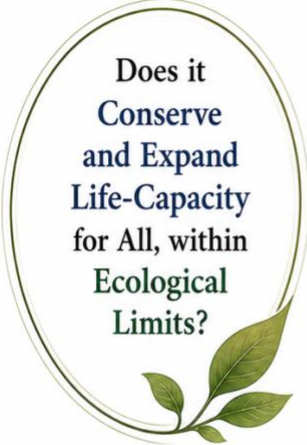






A short version may be stated as follows:

Does this decision protect life necessities, reduce violence, regenerate commons, expand participation, preserve margins, increase real options, remain within ecological limits, and repair harm without creating new domination?

If the answer is yes, the decision moves toward life-coherence.

If the answer is no, the decision may be legal, profitable, popular, efficient, or administratively successful, but it remains politically incoherent at the level of life.

Use this test to guide evaluation, design, and reform.

		YES	PARTLY	NO		
		Does it protect the life-ground (necessities, safety, dignity)?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Does it reduce all forms of violence?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Does it protect and regenerate the civil commons?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Does it enable real participation and voice?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Does it respect ecological limits and regenerate systems?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Does it expand real capabilities and freedoms?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Does it repair harm and reduce inequality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If the answer is no, redesign. If partly, strengthen. If yes, sustain and deepen.  
*The first duty of politics is to conserve the possibility of life.  
 Everything else must answer to that.*

**Figure 9. The Life-Coherence Test.** The Life-Coherence Test evaluates whether policies and exercises of power protect necessities, reduce violence, regenerate commons, expand participation, preserve margins, increase real options, remain within ecological limits, and repair harm without creating new domination.

The Life-Coherence Test is therefore not simply a policy checklist; it is a way of returning political judgment to its first responsibility: the conservation of worlds in which life can continue.

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## 21. Conclusion: The Politics of the Worlds We Conserve

Politics is the art of conserving worlds.

Every law, budget, institution, policy, market, school, clinic, border, platform, court, farm, road, media system, and public ritual participates in world-conservation. Each helps stabilize certain ways of living, relating, knowing, valuing, producing, consuming, belonging, excluding, remembering, and imagining. Politics is not only what happens in parliaments or elections. It is the ongoing organization of the conditions under which life is made possible or impossible.

The central question, therefore, is not only who governs.

The deeper question is: what world is being governed into being?

Modern politics has often forgotten this. It has mistaken system maintenance for life maintenance. It has treated the economy as prior to the living beings it should provision. It has treated ecological systems as external to political life. It has treated care as private residue. It has treated knowledge as a weapon or commodity. It has treated participation as procedure rather than living influence. It has treated security as control rather than peace. It has treated future generations as absent rather than politically present. It has treated the suffering of sacrifice zones as the cost of realism.

This is the condition of life-blind politics.

Life-coherent politics offers a different orientation. It begins from the life-ground: the natural, social, cultural, institutional, and relational conditions without which persons, communities, ecosystems, and future generations cannot continue. It judges political legitimacy by whether these conditions are protected, repaired, and expanded. It asks all power to justify itself before life.

This does not make politics simple. On the contrary, it makes politics more honest. Life-coherent politics recognizes constraint, conflict, uncertainty, tragic choice, plural values, limited resources, institutional failure, historical wounds, and ecological limits. It does not promise harmony without struggle. It does not pretend that all goods can be maximized at once. It does not erase difference in the name of unity.

But it insists that struggle remain answerable to the life-ground.

It insists that conflict not become dehumanization.

It insists that security not become domination.

It insists that economy not become sacrifice.

It insists that technology not become attention capture and surveillance.

It insists that law not become procedure without repair.

It insists that democracy not become voting without participation.

It insists that development not become ecological overshoot.

It insists that knowledge not become manipulation.

It insists that law remain answerable to life, that rights protect real capacities rather than abstract claims alone, that constitutional orders guard the life-ground, and that sovereignty become stewardship rather than permission to degrade the conditions of present and future life (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966a, 1966b, 2022; McMurtry, 2011).

It insists that realism not become obedience to life-destroying systems.

The framework developed in this white paper can be summarized through seven commitments.

First, politics must protect life necessities.

Second, politics must reduce the patterned suppression of life-capacity.

Third, politics must regenerate the civil and ecological commons.

Fourth, politics must preserve the margins required for resilience, deliberation, care, and future life.

Fifth, politics must expand real options for persons and communities under constraint.

Sixth, politics must enable meaningful participation by those affected by decisions.

Seventh, politics must repair harm without reproducing domination.

These commitments do not belong exclusively to any party, ideology, religion, nation, or movement. They are prior to political identity because they concern the conditions that make political identity possible. Any tradition may become more life-coherent by submitting itself to these questions. Any tradition may become life-blind by refusing them.

This is why life-coherent politics is not merely a policy agenda. It is a shift in political perception.

It teaches societies to ask different questions.

Not only: did the economy grow?

But: did life-capacity expand?

Not only: was the law followed?

But: did justice and repair occur?

Not only: was security maintained?

But: were people protected without domination?

Not only: were citizens consulted?

But: did affected life enter the decision?

Not only: was the budget balanced?

But: what margins were preserved or consumed?

Not only: was innovation achieved?

But: did technology serve life?

Not only: was the system stabilized?

But: what world did the stabilization conserve?

The future of politics may depend on this shift.

A world facing ecological disruption, democratic erosion, inequality, displacement, technological acceleration, public distrust, and spiritual exhaustion cannot be adequately governed by life-blind categories. It cannot be saved by power-struggle alone, nor by technocratic management, nor by market expansion, nor by nostalgic return, nor by endless culture war. It requires a politics capable of perceiving the living field and repairing it.

Life-coherent politics names that possibility.

It is the politics of potable water and truthful speech.

The politics of breathable air and shared reality.

The politics of care work and constitutional duty.

The politics of healthy bodies and healthy institutions.

The politics of ecological limits and real freedom.

The politics of local belonging and planetary responsibility.

The politics of rights as living capacities and sovereignty as stewardship.

The politics of grief, repair, and future guardianship.

The politics of the child, the elder, the migrant, the worker, the caregiver, the coral reef, the river, the soil, the unborn, and the dissenter.

The politics of the worlds we conserve.

Its guiding axiom is simple:

The first duty of politics is to conserve the possibility of life (McMurtry, 2011; Maturana & Verden-Zöller, 2008).

Everything else must answer to that.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A. Life-Coherence Policy Checklist

This checklist is designed for policy-makers, civil-society organizations, communities, public institutions, researchers, educators, and citizens who wish to evaluate whether a proposed policy, law, budget, program, technology, institutional reform, or development project is life-coherent.

It is not intended to replace technical assessment, legal review, economic analysis, environmental impact assessment, human-rights review, or democratic deliberation. Rather, it provides a life-ground orientation that can be used alongside these tools. Its purpose is to ensure that political decisions remain answerable to the conditions of life.

---

#### A.1 Life-Ground Protection

**Core question:** Does the policy protect the conditions by which life can continue?

Consider whether the policy affects:

- Air quality
- Water security
- Food and nutrition
- Shelter and housing
- Bodily safety
- Public health
- Mental health
- Care systems
- Ecological stability
- Climate resilience
- Social trust
- Democratic participation
- Cultural continuity
- Future generations

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy protects or restores basic life conditions, reduces exposure to harm, and strengthens the systems that sustain life.

**Warning signs:**

The policy treats life necessities as secondary, externalizes harm to vulnerable groups, weakens ecological systems, or protects institutional performance while degrading lived conditions.

---

## A.2 Necessities and Capabilities

**Core question:** Does the policy help people meet life necessities and develop real capabilities?

Assess whether the policy improves access to:

- Safe water
- Nutritious food
- Adequate housing
- Health care
- Education
- Sanitation
- Energy
- Care
- Safe mobility
- Meaningful work
- Social protection
- Cultural participation
- Political voice

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy expands real capacity, especially for those whose life necessities are currently unmet.

**Warning signs:**

The policy increases formal choice while leaving people without real options, or improves outcomes for already advantaged groups while deepening deprivation for others.

---

## A.3 Violence Reduction

**Core question:** Does the policy reduce or intensify life-capacity suppression?

Examine possible forms of:

- Direct violence
- Structural violence
- Cultural violence
- Ecological violence
- Economic violence
- Administrative violence

- Gendered violence
- Racialized or colonial violence
- Epistemic violence
- Intergenerational violence

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy reduces avoidable harm, names hidden forms of violence, and creates pathways for repair.

**Warning signs:**

The policy reduces visible disorder while increasing hidden harm, transfers burden to the vulnerable, or legitimizes domination through neutral language.

---

## A.4 Commons Regeneration

**Core question:** Does the policy protect or regenerate the civil and ecological commons?

Consider effects on:

- Public health systems
- Education systems
- Water systems
- Sanitation systems
- Care infrastructure
- Ecological systems
- Food systems
- Housing systems
- Knowledge commons
- Democratic trust
- Public institutions
- Local community capacity
- Cultural memory
- Emergency preparedness

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy strengthens shared life-support systems and protects them from capture, neglect, or enclosure.

**Warning signs:**

The policy privatizes benefits while socializing harms, weakens public capacity, undermines trust, or converts necessities into extraction opportunities.

## A.5 Participation and Voice

**Core question:** Have affected persons and communities meaningfully shaped the decision?

Assess whether the process includes:

- Communities directly affected
- Workers affected
- Caregivers affected
- Youth
- Elders
- Disabled persons
- Poor and marginalized communities
- Indigenous or historically excluded groups
- Local knowledge holders
- Scientific and technical experts
- Future-generation representatives
- Ecological guardians or environmental advocates

**Life-coherent signs:**

Affected communities have real influence, and their knowledge changes the design, implementation, and accountability of the policy.

**Warning signs:**

Participation is symbolic, rushed, inaccessible, extractive, or used to legitimize decisions already made.

---

## A.6 Margin and Resilience

**Core question:** Does the policy preserve or consume the margins required for resilience?

Assess effects on:

- Household security
- Worker well-being
- Caregiver capacity
- Public-sector capacity
- Ecological buffers
- Fiscal space
- Trust
- Time
- Redundancy
- Diversity
- Community cohesion

- Institutional legitimacy
- Emergency reserves

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy builds reserves, redundancy, trust, adaptive capacity, and long-term resilience.

**Warning signs:**

The policy appears efficient by eliminating buffers, increasing overload, weakening care, or transferring risk to those with the least margin.

---

## A.7 Real Options

**Core question:** Does the policy expand real viable options?

Consider whether people gain greater ability to:

- Meet necessities
- Refuse exploitation
- Access care
- Learn
- Work with dignity
- Participate politically
- Remain rooted where they live
- Move safely when necessary
- Adapt to disturbance
- Recover from harm
- Dissent without fear
- Imagine and pursue a viable future

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy expands substantive freedom under real conditions.

**Warning signs:**

The policy increases nominal choice while narrowing real possibility, or creates options for some by degrading life conditions for others.

---

## A.8 Ecological Boundaries

**Core question:** Does the policy remain within ecological limits?

Assess effects on:

- Climate stability

- Biodiversity
- Freshwater systems
- Soil health
- Land use
- Oceans and reefs
- Pollution
- Waste
- Material throughput
- Energy use
- Ecosystem regeneration
- Future ecological risk

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy reduces ecological overshoot and supports regeneration.

**Warning signs:**

The policy shifts ecological harm elsewhere, delays necessary transition, treats natural systems as externalities, or sacrifices future life for present gain.

## A.9 Time Horizon

**Core question:** Who benefits now, and who pays later?

Assess whether the policy:

- Protects future generations
- Avoids irreversible harm
- Prevents deferred maintenance
- Reduces long-term vulnerability
- Accounts for climate risk
- Protects children’s developmental futures
- Avoids fiscal or ecological debt traps
- Builds long-term public capacity

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy preserves future options and avoids silent dispossession of those not present.

**Warning signs:**

The policy creates short-term gain by transferring cost to children, future generations, ecosystems, or future governments.

## A.10 Repair

**Core question:** If harm exists or is produced, what repair is built into the policy?

Consider whether the policy includes:

- Restitution
- Compensation
- Ecological restoration
- Trauma-informed support
- Institutional reform
- Public apology or truth-telling
- Community healing
- Monitoring
- Corrective feedback
- Long-term support
- Prevention of recurrence

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy acknowledges harm and creates durable repair pathways.

**Warning signs:**

The policy asks affected persons to bear loss without recognition, support, restoration, or structural change.

---

## A.11 Power and Accountability

**Core question:** How does the policy redistribute power?

Assess whether the policy:

- Concentrates or democratizes power
- Increases or reduces surveillance
- Creates or limits arbitrary authority
- Strengthens or weakens public accountability
- Enables corruption or capture
- Protects dissent
- Makes decisions reviewable
- Provides complaint and redress mechanisms
- Allows affected communities to monitor outcomes

**Life-coherent signs:**

Power becomes more accountable to affected life.

**Warning signs:**

The policy gives unaccountable actors greater control over necessities, data, land, labor, bodies, public money, or ecological systems.

---

## A.12 World-Conservation

**Core question:** What kind of world does this policy conserve?

Ask whether the policy stabilizes a world of:

- Care or abandonment
- Dignity or humiliation
- Truth or manipulation
- Commons or enclosure
- Participation or control
- Ecological fit or overshoot
- Repair or denial
- Shared prosperity or sacrifice zones
- Peace or domination
- Future guardianship or short-term extraction

**Life-coherent signs:**

The policy conserves a world in which life can continue, develop, belong, participate, and flourish.

**Warning signs:**

The policy conserves a world in which systems survive by consuming life.

---

## Appendix B. Diagnostic Matrix for Life-Capacity Suppression

This matrix helps identify where and how political arrangements suppress life-capacity. It can be used for policy review, institutional diagnosis, community assessment, strategic planning, research, advocacy, or public deliberation.

Life-capacity suppression occurs when persons, communities, ecosystems, or future generations are prevented from meeting necessities, developing capacities, participating meaningfully, or remaining within viable relations.

---

### B.1 Direct Suppression

**Description:** Immediate harm to bodies, persons, or communities.

**Examples:**

- Killing
- Assault
- War
- Police brutality
- Domestic violence
- Forced displacement
- Torture
- Imprisonment under abusive conditions
- Physical intimidation
- Political repression

**Diagnostic questions:**

- Who is being directly harmed?
- Who has the authority or capacity to inflict harm?
- Who is protected, and who is exposed?
- What accountability mechanisms exist?
- What repair is owed?

**Life-coherent response:**

Immediate protection, accountability, trauma care, legal remedy, prevention, and transformation of conditions that allow direct harm.

---

## B.2 Structural Suppression

**Description:** Harm produced by ordinary institutional arrangements.

**Examples:**

- Poverty
- Unequal access to health care
- Food insecurity
- Unsafe housing
- Environmental racism
- Exclusionary education systems
- Gendered economic dependency
- Precarious labor
- Unequal exposure to disaster risk
- Administrative barriers to rights or services

**Diagnostic questions:**

- What institutional patterns produce unequal life chances?
- Who benefits from the arrangement?
- Who bears the cost?
- What histories created the pattern?
- What alternatives are available?

**Life-coherent response:**

Structural reform, universal access to necessities, equity-oriented policy, institutional accountability, and redistribution of life-serving capacity.

---

## B.3 Cultural Suppression

**Description:** Narratives, values, symbols, and meanings that legitimize harm.

**Examples:**

- Blaming poverty on moral failure
- Treating ecological destruction as progress
- Normalizing racism, sexism, xenophobia, or ableism
- Portraying migrants as threats
- Glorifying domination
- Treating care as weakness
- Framing public provision as dependency
- Treating sacrifice zones as necessary

**Diagnostic questions:**

- What stories make harm appear normal?
- What language conceals violence?
- Which groups are devalued?
- What forms of suffering are mocked, denied, or individualized?
- What counter-narratives are needed?

**Life-coherent response:**

Cultural repair, public education, truth-telling, media accountability, inclusive memory, and reevaluation of care, commons, and ecological responsibility.

---

## B.4 Ecological Suppression

**Description:** Degradation of natural systems required for life.

**Examples:**

- Climate destabilization
- Water contamination
- Air pollution
- Biodiversity loss
- Soil degradation
- Deforestation
- Coral reef decline
- Overfishing
- Toxic waste
- Unsustainable land use

**Diagnostic questions:**

- What ecological life-support systems are being damaged?
- Who depends on them?
- Who profits from degradation?
- Are thresholds being approached or crossed?
- What restoration is possible?
- What harms are irreversible?

**Life-coherent response:**

Ecological protection, restoration, precaution, regenerative production, climate action, just transition, and intergenerational accountability.

---

## B.5 Economic Suppression

**Description:** Economic arrangements that subordinate life to accumulation.

**Examples:**

- Exploitative labor
- Debt traps
- Predatory lending
- Financialization of housing
- Commodification of necessities
- Wage theft
- Unpaid care depletion
- Monopoly control
- Speculative extraction
- Externalization of ecological harm

**Diagnostic questions:**

- Does the economic arrangement provision life or extract from it?
- Are necessities secure or commodified beyond reach?
- Who controls productive assets?
- Who has bargaining power?
- Where are costs externalized?
- What life-value is invisible?

**Life-coherent response:**

Living wages, universal basic services, care recognition, cooperative and public-interest ownership, anti-predatory regulation, tax justice, and life-grounded indicators.

---

## B.6 Administrative Suppression

**Description:** Harm created through procedures, bureaucracy, delay, complexity, or institutional indifference.

**Examples:**

- Denial of benefits through excessive paperwork
- Delayed health approvals
- Inaccessible services
- Humiliating eligibility tests
- Fragmented referral systems
- Digital exclusion
- Procedural cruelty

- Unresponsive complaint systems
- Punitive compliance regimes

**Diagnostic questions:**

- Do procedures help people access life necessities or block them?
- Who is excluded by complexity?
- What burdens are placed on those already under stress?
- Are institutions designed for dignity or suspicion?
- How are errors corrected?

**Life-coherent response:**

Human-centered administration, accessibility, simplification, rights-based service design, case support, appeal mechanisms, and dignity-preserving access.

## B.7 Epistemic Suppression

**Description:** Harm caused by silencing, distorting, enclosing, or manipulating knowledge.

**Examples:**

- Disinformation
- Suppression of scientific findings
- Dismissal of community testimony
- Erasure of Indigenous knowledge
- Lack of public data
- Corporate secrecy
- Algorithmic opacity
- Media manipulation
- Educational censorship
- Historical denial

**Diagnostic questions:**

- Who is prevented from knowing?
- Who is prevented from being believed?
- Who benefits from confusion?
- What knowledge is hidden or inaccessible?
- What institutions protect truth-seeking?
- How can claims be corrected?

**Life-coherent response:**

Open knowledge, independent media, public science, community research, transparency, whistleblower protection, algorithmic accountability, and truth-telling institutions.

---

## B.8 Relational Suppression

**Description:** Damage to the relations through which life develops and belongs.

**Examples:**

- Loneliness
- Social fragmentation
- Family separation
- Humiliation
- Racism
- Gender domination
- Intergenerational rupture
- Community displacement
- Loss of trust
- Polarization
- Cultural erasure

**Diagnostic questions:**

- What relationships are being damaged?
- Who is denied belonging?
- What forms of recognition are missing?
- What histories remain unrepaired?
- What spaces for encounter and healing exist?
- What would restore coexistence?

**Life-coherent response:**

Community-building, restorative justice, anti-discrimination policy, cultural protection, family support, participatory repair, trauma-informed institutions, and civic rituals of truth and renewal.

---

## B.9 Intergenerational Suppression

**Description:** Harm transferred to children, youth, and future generations.

**Examples:**

- Climate debt
- Public debt without life-serving investment
- Ecological overshoot
- Educational neglect
- Childhood poverty
- Deferred infrastructure maintenance

- Soil and water depletion
- Loss of biodiversity
- Toxic contamination
- Destruction of cultural memory

**Diagnostic questions:**

- What costs are being deferred?
- What future options are being closed?
- Are children protected now?
- Are long-term risks honestly counted?
- Who speaks for those not yet present?
- What irreversible harms are being authorized?

**Life-coherent response:**

Future-generation institutions, precaution, long-term planning, ecological restoration, child-centered policy, youth participation, and constitutional or legal duties of guardianship.

---

## Appendix C. Civil Commons Inventory Template

This template can be used by communities, ministries, municipalities, schools, health systems, civil-society organizations, or national planning bodies to map the condition of the civil commons.

The aim is to identify what shared life-support systems exist, whether they are strong or fragile, who has access, what threats they face, and what forms of repair or investment are needed.

---

### C.1 Public Health Commons

**Key assets:**

- Primary care
- Public-health surveillance
- Immunization
- Maternal and child health
- Environmental health
- Mental-health services
- Emergency preparedness
- Health education
- Community health workers
- Disease prevention systems

**Assessment questions:**

- Are services accessible, trusted, and equitable?
- Are prevention and public health adequately funded?
- Are health workers supported?
- Are social determinants of health addressed?
- Can the system detect and respond to emerging threats?
- Are vulnerable groups protected?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

### C.2 Education Commons

**Key assets:**

- Early childhood education
- Primary and secondary schools
- Vocational education
- Universities
- Libraries
- Civic education
- Teacher development
- Digital literacy
- Cultural education
- Lifelong learning

**Assessment questions:**

- Are children ready and supported to learn?
- Are teachers respected and resourced?
- Does education develop judgment, participation, and ecological responsibility?
- Are marginalized learners included?
- Are schools safe and nourishing environments?
- Is education connected to community life and future viability?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

### C.3 Water and Sanitation Commons

**Key assets:**

- Drinking-water systems
- Watersheds
- Wells and springs
- Wastewater systems
- Sanitation infrastructure
- Water-quality monitoring
- Affordability protections
- Flood-management systems
- Community water governance
- Emergency water reserves

**Assessment questions:**

- Is water safe, sufficient, affordable, and accessible?
- Are watersheds protected?
- Is sanitation dignified and reliable?
- Are climate risks incorporated?

- Are poor and rural communities protected?
- Is water governance transparent?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

## C.4 Food Commons

**Key assets:**

- Local agriculture
- Fisheries
- Food distribution
- School meals
- Food safety systems
- Nutrition programs
- Seed systems
- Community gardens
- Emergency food reserves
- Markets and cooperatives

**Assessment questions:**

- Can people access nutritious, culturally appropriate food?
- Are farmers, fishers, and food workers supported?
- Is the food system climate-resilient?
- Is local production protected?
- Is food waste minimized?
- Are children and vulnerable households nourished?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

## C.5 Housing and Land Commons

**Key assets:**

- Affordable housing
- Social housing
- Secure tenure
- Land-use planning

- Disaster-resilient building standards
- Community land trusts
- Homelessness services
- Accessible housing
- Public spaces
- Cultural landscapes

**Assessment questions:**

- Can people dwell securely and affordably?
- Are communities protected from displacement?
- Is housing safe under climate and disaster risk?
- Is land used in ways that support life?
- Are speculative pressures controlled?
- Are vulnerable groups housed with dignity?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

## C.6 Care Commons

**Key assets:**

- Childcare
- Elder care
- Disability support
- Family services
- Community care networks
- Mental-health support
- Palliative care
- Caregiver respite
- Social work
- Mutual aid

**Assessment questions:**

- Are caregivers supported or exhausted?
- Is care accessible and dignified?
- Are children, elders, and disabled persons protected?
- Is unpaid care recognized?
- Are families supported before crisis?
- Are care systems culturally appropriate?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

## Priority repairs:

---

### C.7 Ecological Commons

#### Key assets:

- Forests
- Wetlands
- Reefs
- Rivers
- Watersheds
- Coastlines
- Biodiversity
- Soil systems
- Protected areas
- Climate-regulating ecosystems

#### Assessment questions:

- Are ecosystems healthy or degrading?
- Are thresholds being approached?
- Are communities involved in stewardship?
- Are ecological harms monitored?
- Are restoration efforts underway?
- Are future generations protected?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

#### Priority repairs:

---

### C.8 Knowledge and Media Commons

#### Key assets:

- Libraries
- Schools and universities
- Public data systems
- Independent media
- Archives
- Community knowledge
- Scientific institutions
- Civic education
- Transparency laws

- Digital public-interest infrastructure

**Assessment questions:**

- Can people access reliable knowledge?
- Are public data transparent?
- Is journalism independent and trusted?
- Are local and marginalized knowledges included?
- Is misinformation addressed without censorship abuse?
- Are digital systems accountable?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

## C.9 Democratic Commons

**Key assets:**

- Elections
- Courts
- Local councils
- Public consultation
- Participatory budgeting
- Civil-society organizations
- Ombuds institutions
- Anti-corruption bodies
- Access-to-information systems
- Community assemblies

**Assessment questions:**

- Can people meaningfully influence decisions?
- Are institutions trusted?
- Are corruption and capture controlled?
- Are marginalized voices heard?
- Are decisions transparent?
- Are feedback and complaint systems effective?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

## C.10 Peace and Safety Commons

### **Key assets:**

- Community mediation
- Restorative justice
- Violence-prevention programs
- Gender-based violence services
- Youth opportunity programs
- Trauma support
- Accountable policing
- Courts
- Emergency response
- Conflict-resolution institutions

### **Assessment questions:**

- Are people safe from direct violence?
- Are structural causes of violence addressed?
- Are security systems accountable?
- Are victims supported?
- Are communities involved in prevention?
- Are conflict and harm repaired?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

### **Priority repairs:**

---

## C.11 Economic Provisioning Commons

### **Key assets:**

- Worker protections
- Living-wage systems
- Social protection
- Cooperatives
- Credit unions
- Public procurement
- Local enterprise
- Public-interest finance
- Skills development
- Just-transition programs

### **Assessment questions:**

- Does the economy provision life necessities?
- Are workers treated with dignity?
- Are livelihoods secure and meaningful?
- Is care work recognized?
- Are local economies resilient?
- Is economic power accountable?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

## C.12 Intergenerational Commons

**Key assets:**

- Youth councils
- Future-generation offices
- Long-term planning systems
- Climate-risk assessments
- Ecological trust funds
- Child development policy
- Public debt accountability
- Cultural memory institutions
- Constitutional safeguards
- Long-term infrastructure planning

**Assessment questions:**

- Are children and youth protected now?
- Are future generations represented?
- Are long-term risks counted?
- Is ecological inheritance protected?
- Are cultural and historical memories conserved?
- Are irreversible harms prevented?

**Condition rating:** Strong / Adequate / Fragile / Failing / Unknown

**Priority repairs:**

---

## Appendix D. Indicators for Life-Coherent Political Assessment

Indicators do not replace judgment, but they shape what societies notice. A life-coherent politics requires indicators that reveal whether life-capacity is being protected, suppressed, repaired, or expanded.

The following indicator domains are illustrative. They should be adapted to local context, data availability, community priorities, and ecological conditions.

---

### D.1 Life Necessities

Possible indicators:

- Access to safe drinking water
- Access to sanitation
- Food insecurity prevalence
- Child malnutrition
- Housing affordability
- Homelessness
- Energy access
- Access to essential health services
- Access to essential medicines
- Public transportation access
- Digital access for essential services

**Interpretive question:**

Are people able to meet the basic conditions of life with dignity?

---

### D.2 Health and Embodied Capacity

Possible indicators:

- Life expectancy
- Healthy life expectancy
- Infant and maternal mortality
- Preventable mortality
- Chronic disease prevalence
- Mental-health burden
- Disability inclusion
- Primary-care coverage
- Immunization coverage

- Environmental disease burden
- Health-worker density and burnout
- Out-of-pocket health expenditure

**Interpretive question:**

Are bodies becoming more capable of participation, or are political arrangements being written into illness?

---

### D.3 Care and Social Reproduction

Possible indicators:

- Availability of childcare
- Elder-care access
- Disability support access
- Unpaid care hours
- Caregiver burden
- Parental leave
- Gender distribution of care work
- Social-work capacity
- Community-care networks
- Palliative-care access

**Interpretive question:**

Is the society protecting the care systems that reproduce life?

---

### D.4 Education and Development

Possible indicators:

- Early childhood development outcomes
- School attendance
- Literacy and numeracy
- School completion
- Teacher-student ratios
- Teacher retention and well-being
- Civic education quality
- Digital literacy
- Inclusion of disabled learners
- Access to libraries
- Youth sense of future possibility

**Interpretive question:**

Is education developing world-participating persons or merely sorting individuals for the economy?

---

## D.5 Ecological Integrity

Possible indicators:

- Greenhouse-gas emissions
- Renewable energy share
- Air quality
- Water quality
- Freshwater availability
- Biodiversity status
- Forest cover
- Soil health
- Coral reef condition
- Waste generation
- Plastic pollution
- Land-use change
- Protected and restored ecosystems
- Climate-risk exposure

**Interpretive question:**

Is the society remaining within ecological limits and regenerating the life-ground?

---

## D.6 Economic Provisioning and Dignified Work

Possible indicators:

- Living-wage coverage
- Unemployment and underemployment
- Precarious employment
- Working poverty
- Workplace injury rates
- Worker voice and unionization
- Income inequality
- Wealth inequality
- Household debt burden
- Cost-of-living pressure
- Local enterprise resilience
- Cooperative or community ownership
- Tax fairness

**Interpretive question:**

Does the economy provision life, or does life serve the economy?

---

## D.7 Housing, Land, and Place Security

Possible indicators:

- Housing affordability
- Overcrowding
- Homelessness
- Security of tenure
- Climate-safe housing
- Informal settlement risk
- Eviction rates
- Access to green and public space
- Commute burden
- Land concentration
- Displacement risk
- Cultural landscape protection

**Interpretive question:**

Can people dwell securely in places that support health, belonging, and participation?

---

## D.8 Democratic Participation and Trust

Possible indicators:

- Voter participation
- Participation in local governance
- Public consultation quality
- Trust in institutions
- Perceived corruption
- Access-to-information requests and responses
- Civic-organization density
- Representation of marginalized groups
- Youth participation
- Public complaint resolution
- Judicial independence
- Media freedom

**Interpretive question:**

Can people meaningfully shape the worlds that shape them?

---

## D.9 Peace, Safety, and Non-Domination

Possible indicators:

- Homicide and assault rates
- Gender-based violence
- Child abuse and neglect
- Police accountability
- Incarceration rates
- Community mediation access
- Restorative justice availability
- Conflict incidence
- Perceived safety
- Hate crimes
- Discrimination complaints
- Trauma-support access

**Interpretive question:**

Are people protected without domination, and are causes of violence being transformed?

---

## D.10 Knowledge and Epistemic Commons

Possible indicators:

- Public data availability
- Scientific independence
- Library access
- Media trust
- Local journalism capacity
- Misinformation exposure
- Digital literacy
- Academic freedom
- Whistleblower protections
- Transparency of algorithmic systems
- Community research participation
- Public understanding of major risks

**Interpretive question:**

Can the society perceive reality well enough to repair harm?

---

## D.11 Margins and Resilience

Possible indicators:

- Emergency reserves
- Disaster preparedness
- Public-health surge capacity
- Food reserves
- Water reserves
- Fiscal space for social protection
- Household savings or emergency capacity
- Social support networks
- Infrastructure redundancy
- Ecosystem buffers
- Institutional trust
- Worker burnout
- Community recovery time after shocks

### **Interpretive question:**

Does the society have enough margin to absorb disturbance without collapse or abandonment?

---

## D.12 Future Generations

Possible indicators:

- Child poverty
- Youth mental health
- Youth unemployment
- Educational attainment
- Public debt quality
- Infrastructure maintenance backlog
- Long-term climate risk
- Biodiversity inheritance
- Intergenerational mobility
- Youth participation in decision-making
- Long-term policy assessment
- Future-generation representation

### **Interpretive question:**

Are present decisions preserving or foreclosing future life-capacity?

---

## D.13 Integration Principles for Indicators

Indicators should be:

1. **Life-grounded** — tied to real conditions of life.
2. **Equity-sensitive** — disaggregated by relevant differences.
3. **Ecologically bounded** — attentive to limits and regeneration.
4. **Participatory** — shaped by affected communities.
5. **Actionable** — linked to correction pathways.
6. **Transparent** — publicly accessible and understandable.
7. **Plural** — combining quantitative and qualitative knowledge.
8. **Longitudinal** — able to detect trends and early warning signs.
9. **Non-reductive** — not allowed to replace judgment.
10. **Repair-oriented** — used to guide action, not merely describe decline.

The purpose of life-coherent indicators is not to produce another dashboard for passive observation. Their purpose is democratic perception and collective correction.

---

## Appendix E. Glossary of Key Terms

### Administrative violence

Harm produced through procedures, delays, complexity, suspicion, humiliation, or bureaucratic indifference. Administrative violence occurs when institutions that should provide access to rights, care, or necessities instead become barriers to life-capacity.

### Capabilities

The real freedoms or capacities people have to be and do what they have reason to value. In life-coherent politics, capabilities are grounded in life necessities and ecological conditions.

### Care commons

The shared systems, practices, relationships, and institutions through which children, elders, disabled persons, ill persons, families, and communities are supported. Care commons include both formal services and informal relational labor.

### Civil commons

The shared life-support systems through which persons and communities access and reproduce the conditions of life. These include health, education, water, sanitation, ecological protection, care, knowledge, democratic institutions, public trust, and cultural memory.

### Commons

Shared resources, systems, or capacities that sustain collective life and require accountable governance. Commons are not simply unowned resources; they are relationally governed life-support systems.

### Constraint

A real limit, condition, or boundary shaping what political action can do. Constraints may be ecological, institutional, historical, fiscal, bodily, cultural, or relational. Life-coherent politics distinguishes life-serving constraints from domination-producing constraints.

### Cultural violence

Meanings, symbols, narratives, ideologies, or norms that legitimize harm. Cultural violence makes direct, structural, ecological, or administrative violence appear normal, deserved, inevitable, or invisible.

## Democracy as relational coexistence

A view of democracy as more than voting or representation. Democracy is the ongoing practice by which persons recognize one another as legitimate co-participants in shaping a shared world while remaining accountable to the life-ground.

## Direct violence

Immediate physical or psychological harm inflicted on persons or communities, including killing, assault, torture, terror, forced displacement, and bodily coercion.

## Disturbance

An event or pattern that perturbs a living field. Disturbance may include disasters, pandemics, conflict, economic shocks, ecological change, technological disruption, or social unrest. Disturbance can damage systems but also reveal hidden fragilities.

## Ecological violence

The degradation of ecosystems, species, climate, water, soil, air, oceans, or other natural systems required for life. Ecological violence suppresses present and future life-capacity.

## Epistemic commons

The shared conditions that allow a society to know, test, preserve, communicate, contest, and correct reality. The epistemic commons includes science, education, journalism, libraries, archives, public data, local knowledge, and truth-seeking institutions.

## Epistemic violence

Harm caused by silencing, distorting, erasing, enclosing, manipulating, or delegitimizing knowledge. Epistemic violence prevents people from naming and contesting harm.

## Field repair

Policy, institutional, relational, ecological, or cultural action that restores the conditions of life-capacity in a damaged field. Field repair addresses causes and relations, not merely symptoms.

## Future guardianship

The institutional, ethical, and political responsibility to protect future generations from ecological, fiscal, social, cultural, and infrastructural harm imposed by present decisions.

## Great inversion

The reversal by which systems that should serve life instead require life to serve them. The great inversion appears when economies, laws, technologies, bureaucracies, security systems, or institutions demand sacrifice from bodies, communities, ecosystems, or future generations to preserve themselves.

## Human security

A security orientation focused on the safety, dignity, and life-capacity of persons and communities, not merely the territorial or military security of the state.

## Intergenerational violence

The transfer of harm, risk, debt, ecological degradation, trauma, or reduced life-options to children, youth, and future generations.

## Life-capacity

The ability of living beings and communities to meet necessities, develop powers, participate meaningfully, sustain relationships, adapt to disturbance, and flourish within ecological limits.

## Life-coherent politics

The collective practice of governing shared constraints, margins, resources, conflicts, meanings, and institutions so that life-capacity is protected, repaired, and expanded across persons, communities, ecosystems, and generations.

## Life-coherent political economy

An economy organized to provision life within ecological limits. It treats money, markets, finance, work, and technology as means subordinate to life-value and the civil commons.

## Life-coherent security

Security understood as the protection of persons, communities, ecosystems, and future generations from direct violence, structural abandonment, domination, and life-ground degradation.

## Life-ground

The natural, social, cultural, institutional, and relational conditions without which life cannot continue, develop, belong, or participate. The life-ground includes air, water, food, shelter, care, health, education, ecological stability, public trust, and social meaning.

## Life-value

Value measured by contribution to life-capacity rather than by money-value alone. Life-value asks whether an action, institution, or system protects, enables, or expands life.

## Life-blind politics

Politics organized by categories that can register power, legality, growth, status, security, or electoral victory while failing to register whether life-capacity and the life-ground are being degraded.

## Margin

Reserve capacity that allows persons, communities, ecosystems, and institutions to absorb disturbance without collapse. Margin includes time, trust, health, ecological buffers, redundancy, fiscal space, care capacity, and social solidarity.

## Necessities

Conditions required for life and participation, including water, food, shelter, care, health, education, sanitation, safety, ecological stability, and belonging. Necessities are prior to ordinary preferences.

## Non-domination

A condition in which persons and communities are not subject to arbitrary, humiliating, coercive, or unaccountable power. Life-coherent politics seeks protection without domination.

## Options

Real pathways available to persons and communities under constraint. Options are not merely formal choices; they are viable possibilities for living, learning, caring, healing, working, participating, adapting, and dissenting.

## Participatory repair

Collective processes through which affected communities help identify harm, deliberate on causes, design responses, rebuild trust, and restore shared conditions of life. Participatory repair is an alternative to polarization, technocratic imposition, and punitive control.

## Political legitimacy

In life-coherent politics, legitimacy is the accountable conservation and expansion of shared life-capacity under conditions of constraint. Authority is legitimate only insofar as it protects and repairs the life-ground.

## Positive peace

The presence of social, economic, cultural, ecological, and institutional conditions that allow life-capacity to flourish without domination. Positive peace goes beyond the mere absence of direct violence.

## Real participation

Meaningful influence by affected persons and communities over the decisions and conditions that shape their lives. Real participation requires access, voice, knowledge, time, dignity, and institutional responsiveness.

## Sacrifice zone

A place, population, ecosystem, or future made to absorb harm so that a wider system can continue. Sacrifice zones reveal where political orders have normalized the expendability of life.

## Safe-and-just political space

A political condition in which people are protected above the social foundation of life necessities while societies remain below ecological ceilings. It joins social justice with ecological limits.

## State

The present condition of the living field, including bodies, communities, ecosystems, institutions, relationships, meanings, and future possibilities.

## Structural violence

Harm built into ordinary social, economic, legal, political, or institutional arrangements. Structural violence suppresses life-capacity without necessarily appearing as direct physical attack.

## Tragic choice

A political situation in which all available options involve serious loss or harm. Life-coherent politics disciplines tragic choice through life-ground priority, burden fairness, participation, truth-telling, repair, and future accountability.

## World-conservation

The process by which political arrangements stabilize certain ways of living, relating, valuing, knowing, producing, belonging, and imagining. Every political order conserves a world.

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## Back Cover Synopsis

Politics is usually understood as the struggle for power: who governs, who wins elections, who controls resources, who defines law, who secures borders, and whose ideology prevails. But before any society can argue over power, it must remain alive.

**Life-Coherent Politics** proposes a fundamental re-grounding of political thought and practice. It argues that politics is not first the contest to control society, but the collective governance of shared life-capacity. A political order is legitimate only insofar as it protects life necessities, reduces violence, regenerates civil and ecological commons, preserves social and ecological margins, expands real participation, and repairs harm without creating new domination.

Drawing on Humberto Maturana, John McMurtry, Johan Galtung, Elinor Ostrom, Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Kate Raworth, and planetary-boundaries scholarship, this white paper develops a practical framework for moving from life-blind politics to politics as world-conservation. It applies this framework to health, climate, food, water, education, housing, migration, digital life, peace, knowledge, political economy, law, sovereignty, constitutional life-guardianship, and democratic repair.

Its guiding axiom is simple:

**The first duty of politics is to conserve the possibility of life.**

Everything else must answer to that.

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## Author Bio

**Dr. Bichara Sahely, BSc, MBBS, DM Internal Medicine**, is a physician, independent scholar, and public-policy consultant from St. Kitts and Nevis. His work integrates internal medicine, public health, climate resilience, systems thinking, peace theory, life-value philosophy, and commons governance into a developing framework of life-coherence.

He holds a BSc in Biology from Dalhousie University and medical degrees from the University of the West Indies, including specialist training in Internal Medicine. His professional work has included hospital medicine, private clinical practice and health-systems strengthening.

His scholarly and public-facing work is hosted through the Life-Knowledge Commons at [bsahely.com](http://bsahely.com), where he develops integrative frameworks for life-coherent medicine, peace, governance, ecology, civilization, and human flourishing. His central concern is the reorientation of knowledge, policy, and institutional life toward the protection, repair, and expansion of life-capacity across persons, communities, ecosystems, and generations.