

The Tears of Life

A Life-Coherent Framework for Recognizing Harm,
Restoring Conditions, and Reorienting Power

ACADEMIC WHITE PAPER



SEE THE WOUND
Truth before
comfort



ALLOW THE TEARS
Attunement
before action



RESTORE CONDITIONS
Repair before
performance



REORIENT POWER
Service before
control



LIFE FLOURISHES
Life-capacity
for all

*From symbolic performance to real repair.
From power *over* life to power *for* life.*

DR. BICHARA SAHELY

BSc (Biology), MBBS, DM (Internal Medicine)

7 JUNE 2026

The Tears of Life

A Life-Coherent Framework for Recognizing Harm, Restoring
Conditions, and Reorienting Power

Academic White Paper

Author:

Dr. Bichara Sahely, BSc (Biology), MBBS, DM (Internal Medicine)

Date:

7 June 2026

Abstract

Modern human systems often preserve symbols of love, intelligence, progress, order, value, and salvation while failing to restore the conditions through which life continues, recovers, and flourishes. Religion may proclaim love while conserving exclusion or hierarchy; markets may proclaim value while disabling life-value; politics may proclaim representation while weakening participation; medicine may proclaim treatment while neglecting healing conditions; and artificial intelligence may proclaim intelligence while enclosing attention, language, labor, knowledge, and judgment. This white paper develops a life-coherent framework for distinguishing symbolic performance from real repair. Drawing on living systems theory, peace research, life-value philosophy, integral development, ecological systems thinking, and prophetic spirituality, it argues that harm persists when symbols replace conditions, feedback is blocked, and institutions conserve life-disabling patterns. The paper proposes a practical grammar of repair: see the wound, allow the tears, name the false order, identify the missing condition, trace the conserving pattern, restore the life-relation, and make the repair real. It concludes by introducing artificial intelligence as a defining test case for the present age: whether machine intelligence will become tool, oracle, idol, enclosure, or commons depends on whether it is governed by the real conditions of life-capacity rather than by symbolic intelligence, commercial extraction, or institutional control.

Keywords

Life-coherence; life-capacity; symbolic substitution; prophetic grief; artificial intelligence; religion; repair; structural violence; cultural violence; living systems; civil commons; life-value; sacred performance; conditions of life

Executive Summary

This white paper develops a life-coherent framework for recognizing harm, restoring the conditions of life, and reorienting power toward repair. Its central concern is a recurring pattern across human systems: the preservation of symbols while the conditions those symbols are meant to serve are neglected, distorted, or actively disabled. Religion may preserve the symbol of love while failing to protect the vulnerable. Economics may preserve the symbol of value while degrading life-value. Politics may preserve the symbol of representation while weakening participation. Medicine may preserve the symbol of treatment while neglecting the conditions of healing. Technology may preserve the symbol of innovation while undermining wisdom, agency, relationship, and ecological limits. Artificial intelligence may preserve the symbol of intelligence while enclosing attention, language, judgment, knowledge, labor, and culture.

The paper names this pattern **symbolic substitution**. A symbol points toward meaning; a condition enables life. Symbols are not inherently harmful. They can guide, gather, inspire, and transmit wisdom. They become harmful when they replace the conditions they were meant to serve and protect systems from correction by wounded life. Once this substitution occurs, systems may sincerely believe they are serving love, value, progress, order, intelligence, or salvation while conserving patterns that disable life-capacity.

The life-coherent test proposed here is simple but demanding:

Does this system help life continue, recover, and flourish?

This test shifts evaluation away from surface claims — efficiency, legality, innovation, profitability, sacredness, representation, or technical sophistication — toward the real effects of systems on living beings, communities, institutions, ecosystems, and future generations. Life-capacity refers to the concrete ability of life to maintain, express, develop, and enjoy its capacities: to breathe, eat, heal, learn, feel, think, relate, participate, create, care, deliberate, adapt, and flourish within a shared life-ground.

The paper proposes a minimal grammar of life:

Life requires conditions.
Conditions depend on relationships.
Relationships require attunement.
Attunement requires truthful feedback.
Feedback enables repair.
Repair restores capacity.
Capacity allows flourishing.

This grammar is organized through the triad **continue, recover, flourish**. To continue is to preserve the basic integrity and viability of life. To recover is to repair harm, correct error, restore relationship, and learn from feedback. To flourish is to develop capacities for understanding, care, creativity, participation, wisdom, justice, peace, and ecological belonging.

A central contribution of the paper is the distinction between **performative care** and **life-coherent repair**. Performative care preserves the appearance of concern while leaving the underlying conditions unchanged. It says “we care” while people remain unprotected, “we consulted” while power remains unchanged, “we innovated” while wisdom is weakened, “we apologized” while repair is absent, or “we are sustainable” while the life-ground continues to be degraded. Life-coherent repair, by contrast, asks what condition is missing, what relationship is broken, what feedback has been blocked, what pattern is being conserved, and what intervention would restore life-capacity without creating new harm.

The paper develops this into a seven-step repair framework:

1. **See the wound** — What life is suffering here?
2. **Allow the tears** — Can the wound be felt without denial, performance, rage, or despair?
3. **Name the false order** — What story, symbol, metric, ritual, institution, or technology is making harm seem normal?
4. **Identify the missing condition** — What does life require here that is absent, blocked, enclosed, distorted, or substituted?
5. **Trace the conserving pattern** — What inner algorithm, institutional incentive, cultural story, or power structure is preserving the harm?
6. **Restore the life-relation** — What relationship must be repaired?
7. **Make the repair real** — What minimal sufficient intervention would restore life-capacity without creating new harm?

This framework integrates several converging lineages without reducing them to one doctrine. Living systems theory clarifies that life is self-making, relational, and structurally coupled. Ecological systems thinking shows that life is sustained through webs of relationship, feedback, flow, and repair. Peace research distinguishes visible injury from structural and cultural harm. Life-value philosophy grounds value in the enabling of life-capacity. Integral developmental thought reminds us that perspectives are partial and developmentally situated. Prophetic spirituality adds an interior discipline: harm must not only be analyzed; it must be seen, grieved, named, and transformed without hatred.

The phrase **the tears of life** names this contemplative-prophetic movement. Outrage may be the first sign that conscience has not yet been numbed, but outrage alone is not repair. Outrage sees that something is wrong; tears reveal that something living has been wounded. The tears restore attunement. They prevent analysis from becoming cold, activism from becoming hateful, religion from becoming performative, and politics from becoming tribal. They make possible a form of truth-telling that names harm without dehumanizing the other and seeks repair rather than revenge.

The paper then extends the framework to artificial intelligence. AI is treated not as a separate technical issue but as a defining test case for the present age. AI can function as a **tool, oracle, idol, enclosure, or commons**. As tool, it supports bounded human purposes. As oracle, it offers orientation, prediction, and answers. As idol, it receives excessive trust, sacrifice, and obedience. As enclosure, it captures attention, language, knowledge, labor, culture, and judgment. As

commons, it becomes shared life-serving infrastructure governed for education, care, truth, participation, ecological responsibility, and repair.

The central AI question is therefore not simply whether AI is safe, powerful, useful, or intelligent. The deeper question is:

Does AI support the conditions through which human and ecological life can continue, recover, and flourish?

The paper concludes that the task is not to reject religion, politics, economics, medicine, education, technology, or artificial intelligence. Each can serve life. Each can also become captured. The task is to keep every system corrigible by life: able to receive feedback from those it affects, name harm truthfully, restore missing conditions, repair broken relationships, and change the patterns it has been conserving.

The final claim is simple:

Life-coherence is the practice of recognizing what life requires, restoring what harm has broken, and organizing power so that life can continue, recover, and flourish.

Where the wound is seen, where the tears are allowed, where the false order is named, and where the missing conditions are restored, power can return to service and life can begin again.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Keywords	2
Executive Summary	3
List of Figures	7
List of Tables	7
1. Introduction: When Symbols Replace Life	8
2. The Misrecognition of Life-Conditions	11
3. The Conditions of Life	15
4. Religion, Love, and the Drift into Performance	19
5. The Tears of Life: From Outrage to Prophetic Repair	21
6. The Inner Algorithms of Capture	25
7. Direct, Structural, and Cultural Harm	28
8. The Life-Coherent Repair Framework	31
8.1 See the Wound	31
8.2 Allow the Tears	32
8.3 Name the False Order	32
8.4 Identify the Missing Condition	32
8.5 Trace the Conserving Pattern	33
8.6 Restore the Life-Relation	33
8.7 Make the Repair Real	33
9. Artificial Intelligence: Tool, Oracle, Idol, Enclosure, or Commons?	35
9.1 AI as Tool	36
9.2 AI as Oracle	36
9.3 AI as Idol	37
9.4 AI as Enclosure	37
9.5 AI as Commons	38
9.6 Bridge to a Full AI Paper	38
10. Reorienting Power to Life	40

References	43
Author Bio.....	45
AI Use Statement	45
Back Cover Synopsis	45

List of Figures

Figure 1. Symbol versus Condition.	12
Figure 2. The Conditions of Life.	16
Figure 3. The Arc from Wound to Repair.	23
Figure 4. Inner Algorithms and Institutional Capture.....	25
Figure 5. Direct, Structural, and Cultural Harm.....	28
Figure 6. AI as Tool, Oracle, Idol, Enclosure, or Commons.....	35
Figure 7. The Life-Coherent Repair Cycle.....	41

List of Tables

Table 1. Symbols and Conditions Across Human Systems	13
Table 2. From Performative Care to Life-Coherent Repair.....	31
Table 3. AI as Tool, Oracle, Idol, Enclosure, or Commons.	36

1. Introduction: When Symbols Replace Life

Human beings live by symbols. We gather around words, images, rituals, flags, doctrines, metrics, technologies, laws, professions, institutions, and stories that help orient us in the world. Symbols can disclose meaning, sustain memory, gather communities, transmit wisdom, and call people beyond self-enclosure toward responsibility, compassion, and shared life. The problem is not that human beings use symbols. The problem begins when symbols meant to serve life become detached from the conditions through which life is actually sustained.

A society may preserve the symbol of love while failing to protect the vulnerable. It may preserve the symbol of value while destroying the life-ground from which value arises. It may preserve the symbol of democracy while disabling participation. It may preserve the symbol of treatment while neglecting the conditions of healing. It may preserve the symbol of development while enclosing land, water, culture, labor, and future possibility. It may preserve the symbol of intelligence while weakening wisdom, agency, and discernment.

This paper begins from a simple but far-reaching claim: many modern crises are not merely failures of knowledge, technology, belief, management, or political will. They are failures of recognition. Human systems repeatedly mistake the signs of life for the conditions of life. They confuse what points toward life with what actually enables life to continue, recover, and flourish.

This distinction matters because symbols can remain intact even when life is being damaged. A hospital can display the symbols of care while exhausting caregivers and alienating patients. A school can preserve the symbols of achievement while disabling curiosity and belonging. A religious institution can proclaim love while organizing exclusion, shame, or hierarchy. A government can invoke security while undermining trust and participation. An economy can celebrate growth while degrading the ecological and social conditions on which all economic life depends. A technology can simulate intelligence while enclosing attention, judgment, creativity, and meaning.

The crisis is therefore deeper than hypocrisy. It is not simply that human systems say one thing and do another. The deeper issue is that systems can become organized around substitutes. Once substitutes are institutionalized, the system may sincerely believe it is serving life while actually conserving patterns that disable it. Metrics replace value. Ritual replaces relation. Compliance replaces care. Connectivity replaces belonging. Growth replaces development. Prediction replaces wisdom. Performance replaces repair.

The question then becomes: how can human systems be reoriented toward the real conditions of life?

This white paper proposes a life-coherent framework for answering that question. Its central test is not whether a system is sacred, efficient, profitable, innovative, legal, popular, or technologically advanced. The deeper test is whether it helps life continue, recover, and flourish. This test is not sentimental. It is practical, ecological, ethical, developmental, and institutional. It asks what life requires, what harm has broken, what feedback has been blocked, what

relationship has been distorted, what symbol has replaced a condition, and what repair would restore life-capacity.

The framework draws on several converging lineages. From living systems theory, especially the work of Maturana and Varela, it receives the insight that living beings are not machines controlled from outside but self-making systems sustained through structural coupling. From ecological systems thinking, it receives the insight that life is a web of relationships, flows, feedbacks, and patterns embodied in material processes. From peace research, especially Johan Galtung's distinction between direct, structural, and cultural violence, it receives a grammar for identifying harms that are visible, systemic, and culturally normalized. From John McMurtry's life-value philosophy, it receives the criterion that value is grounded in what enables life-capacity. From integral developmental thought, it receives the reminder that every perspective is partial, every level of consciousness interprets reality differently, and every system has interior, behavioral, cultural, and structural dimensions. From Richard Rohr's prophetic spirituality, it receives a crucial interior correction: harm must not only be analyzed; it must be seen, grieved, named, and transformed without hatred (Capra, 1996; Galtung, 1969, 1990; Maturana & Varela, 1980; McMurtry, 2004–2011, 2013; Rohr, 2025; Wilber, 2000, 2006).

The paper does not attempt to reduce these thinkers to one system. Rather, it asks whether their insights converge around a more fundamental life-grammar. That grammar can be stated simply:

Life requires conditions.
Conditions depend on relationships.
Relationships require attunement.
Attunement requires truthful feedback.
Feedback enables repair.
Repair restores capacity.
Capacity allows flourishing.

This grammar is not a doctrine to be imposed. It is a diagnostic and reparative lens. It asks every system, belief, technology, economy, institution, and form of power to return to the question: what does life require here?

The paper proceeds in ten movements. First, it introduces the crisis of symbolic substitution. Second, it distinguishes symbols from conditions. Third, it articulates the minimum conditions of life through the triad of continuing, recovering, and flourishing. Fourth, it examines religion and the drift from living insight into performative love. Fifth, it develops the notion of the tears of life as a contemplative-prophetic movement from outrage to repair. Sixth, it names the inner algorithms of capture that become institutionalized in politics, economics, religion, technology, and artificial intelligence. Seventh, it connects symbolic substitution to direct, structural, and cultural harm. Eighth, it proposes a seven-step life-coherent repair framework. Ninth, it applies the framework to artificial intelligence as tool, oracle, idol, enclosure, or commons. Finally, it concludes by calling for the reorientation of power to the conditions of life.

The aim is not to reject religion, markets, politics, medicine, technology, or artificial intelligence. The aim is to convert all powers back to service. A symbol is life-coherent when it points beyond

itself toward the conditions of life. A system is life-coherent when it organizes power so that life can continue, recover, and flourish.

2. The Misrecognition of Life-Conditions

The first distinction is between a symbol and a condition.

A symbol points toward meaning. A condition enables life. The symbol of food is not nourishment. The symbol of care is not care. The symbol of intelligence is not wisdom. The symbol of love is not the restored relation through which love becomes real. Symbols may guide, inspire, remind, and gather, but they cannot substitute for the conditions that life requires.

This distinction may appear obvious, but much of modern institutional life depends on forgetting it. Systems often measure what can be counted, display what can be performed, and preserve what can be administratively verified, while the deeper conditions of life remain unseen. A school may count attendance and examination performance while missing whether students are curious, safe, nourished, and capable of understanding. A health system may count procedures and prescriptions while missing whether patients are restored to life-capacity. A development project may count investment, jobs, infrastructure, and projected revenue while missing whether land, water, sovereignty, trust, ecology, and local agency are strengthened or weakened.

The misrecognition becomes dangerous when symbols are protected more fiercely than the life they were meant to serve. Once this happens, criticism of the system can be interpreted as criticism of the symbol itself. To question an economic model becomes “anti-growth.” To question a technological system becomes “anti-progress.” To question an institutional religion becomes “anti-faith.” To question a national policy becomes “anti-patriotic.” To question an AI system becomes “anti-innovation.” In each case, the symbol is insulated from the life-test.

The life-coherent question cuts through this defense:

What condition of life is actually being enabled or disabled?

This question does not abolish symbols. It restores their proper place. Symbols become harmful not because they are symbolic, but because they become detached from feedback. When a symbol can no longer be corrected by wounded life, it becomes an idol. An idol, in this sense, is not only a religious object. It is any finite form treated as ultimate, any representation protected at the expense of the reality it claims to serve (Tillich, 1957).

Money can become an idol when it is protected while life-value is destroyed. Nation can become an idol when it is protected while citizens, migrants, ecosystems, or future generations are sacrificed. Technology can become an idol when innovation is protected while human agency and ecological conditions are weakened. Religion can become an idol when sacred performance is protected while the vulnerable remain unprotected. Artificial intelligence can become an idol when machine output is granted trust, sacrifice, and obedience beyond its ability to serve life.

The great substitution occurs when the sign of life replaces the condition of life.

Symbol versus Condition

*When symbols point back to life, capacity is restored;
when they replace life, harm is hidden.*

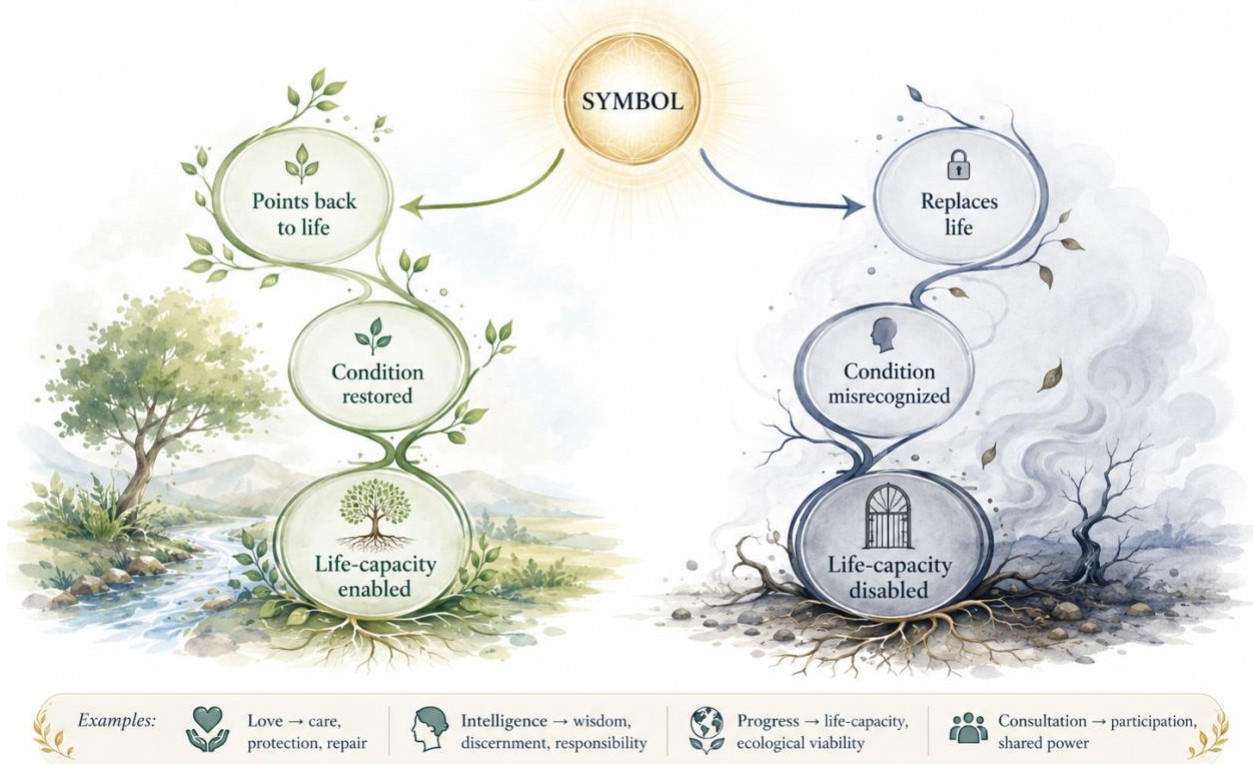


Figure 1. Symbol versus Condition.

Symbols become life-coherent when they point back to the real conditions that sustain life. They become harmful when they replace those conditions and protect systems from correction by wounded life.

In economics, price can replace value. In politics, representation can replace participation. In medicine, treatment can replace healing. In education, certification can replace understanding. In religion, doctrine can replace transformed relation. In technology, connection can replace belonging. In artificial intelligence, generated language can replace wisdom.

This substitution often appears efficient because it simplifies reality. Conditions are complex, relational, and context-sensitive. Symbols are portable, measurable, scalable, and easier to administer. It is easier to record attendance than to cultivate belonging. Easier to count economic output than to measure ecological viability. Easier to issue statements of care than to repair the conditions that created harm. Easier to generate intelligent language than to cultivate wisdom.

Yet life cannot be sustained by symbolic substitution. Life requires actual conditions. A child cannot grow on symbols of care. A community cannot recover through symbols of consultation. An ecosystem cannot regenerate through symbols of sustainability. A patient cannot heal through

symbols of treatment alone. A society cannot become just by preserving symbols of justice while blocking the feedback of the harmed.

Table 1. Symbols and Conditions Across Human Systems

Domain	Symbol Preserved	Condition Misrecognized	Typical Harm	Life-Coherent Repair
Religion	Love, holiness, salvation	Care, protection, accountability, mercy	Sacred performance, exclusion, shame	Restore care, truth, protection, and embodied repair
Economy	Value, growth, efficiency	Life-value, ecological viability, real needs	Extraction, insecurity, ecological damage	Reground value in life-capacity and commons
Politics	Representation, order, security	Participation, trust, justice	Alienation, coercion, mistrust	Restore voice, accountability, and shared power
Medicine	Treatment, procedure, compliance	Healing, function, capacity, relationship	Fragmentation, burnout, depersonalization	Restore patient and caregiver life-capacity
Education	Achievement, certification	Understanding, curiosity, belonging, agency	Anxiety, alienation, shallow learning	Restore learning conditions and developmental capacity
Technology	Innovation, connection, scale	Wisdom, agency, relationship, ecological limits	Dependency, capture, disembodiment	Govern technology by life-conditions
AI	Intelligence, personalization, prediction	Wisdom, judgment, responsibility, truth	Oracle dependency, enclosure, automation of immaturity	Govern AI as tool or commons for life-capacity
Development	Progress, investment, sustainability	Land, water, sovereignty, ecology, participation	Enclosure, displacement, dependency	Test development by life-support and local capacity

This leads to the life-capacity test. The question is not first whether a system is legal, efficient, profitable, sacred, modern, traditional, measurable, popular, or innovative. The question is whether it enables or disables life-capacity. Life-capacity refers to the real ability of living beings to maintain, express, develop, and enjoy the capacities proper to life: breathing, eating, moving, feeling, thinking, relating, healing, learning, participating, creating, caring, deliberating, adapting, and flourishing within a shared life-ground (McMurtry, 2004–2011, 2013).

This criterion is not merely individual. Life-capacity is personal, relational, social, ecological, institutional, and intergenerational. A system may enhance the capacity of one group by disabling another. It may enrich the present by degrading the future. It may increase technical power while weakening wisdom. It may expand consumption while destroying the ecological conditions that make consumption possible. Such gains are not life-coherent. They are displacements of harm.

A life-coherent system must therefore be tested by whether it enables life without disabling other life or the life-ground. This test does not solve every conflict automatically. But it restores the right ground of judgment. It asks human systems to justify themselves not by their symbols, but by their effects on life.

3. The Conditions of Life

If symbolic substitution is the pathology, the recovery begins by returning to the conditions of life.

Every living system requires conditions in order to continue, recover, and flourish. These conditions vary by scale, species, history, culture, and context, but the underlying grammar is stable. Life requires integrity, nourishment, relationship, attunement, feedback, repair, and developmental possibility.

A living body requires air, water, food, rest, movement, regulation, immune defense, and healing. A child requires safety, affection, attachment, play, learning, limits, and belonging. A family requires trust, communication, memory, boundaries, forgiveness, and repair. A community requires reciprocity, participation, shared meaning, ecological support, and institutions that do not betray its life. An ecosystem requires diversity, flow, feedback, regeneration, and resilience. A society requires truth, justice, care, education, participation, and power organized toward the common conditions of life. A civilization requires humility before the life-ground.

The minimum grammar can be stated as follows:

Life requires conditions.
Conditions depend on relationships.
Relationships require attunement.
Attunement requires truthful feedback.
Feedback enables repair.
Repair restores capacity.
Capacity allows flourishing.

The Conditions of Life

Life continues, recovers, and flourishes through relationships, attunement, feedback, repair, and restored capacity.

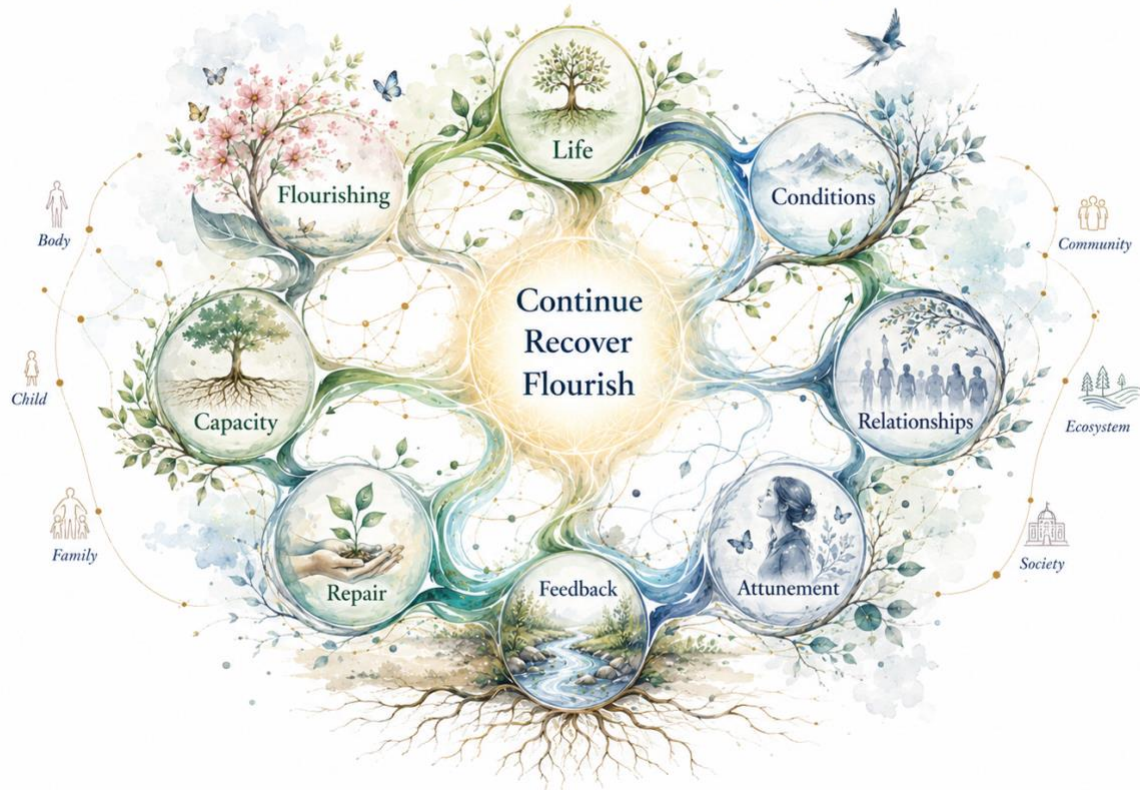


Figure 2. The Conditions of Life.

Life continues, recovers, and flourishes when enabling conditions are sustained through relationships, attunement, feedback, repair, and restored life-capacity.

Each term matters.

Life does not exist as an isolated object. It is embodied, relational, and self-organizing. It is not controlled from outside like a machine. It maintains itself through ongoing interaction with its conditions. This is why relationships matter (Capra, 1996; Maturana & Varela, 1980). Conditions are not abstract provisions but mediated realities: food is grown, carried, cooked, shared, bought, enclosed, or withheld; water is protected, contaminated, privatized, distributed, or restored; care is offered, refused, institutionalized, exhausted, or commodified; meaning is transmitted, distorted, imposed, or healed.

Attunement is the capacity to sense what life is undergoing. A person may be attuned or misattuned to the needs of the body. A parent may be attuned or misattuned to a child. An institution may be attuned or misattuned to the people it serves. A government may be attuned or misattuned to a community. A civilization may be attuned or misattuned to the Earth.

Misattunement is not always malicious. It can arise from abstraction, distance, fear, ideology, trauma, privilege, bureaucracy, speed, or metric capture. But whatever its source, misattunement blocks repair. If suffering is not heard, if feedback is dismissed, if ecological harm is externalized, if the wounded are shamed or silenced, then the system loses its ability to correct itself.

Feedback is therefore essential. Living systems learn through feedback. Institutions also require feedback if they are to remain life-serving. When feedback is truthful, repair becomes possible. When feedback is blocked, harm escalates (Capra, 1996). A system that cannot hear pain becomes dangerous. A system that punishes the messenger becomes pathological. A system that mistakes criticism for disloyalty becomes incapable of learning.

Repair is the process by which broken conditions and distorted relationships are restored. It is not merely apology, compensation, technical adjustment, or symbolic acknowledgment, although each may be necessary. Repair means restoring the conditions through which life can continue and recover. It asks what has been broken, what relation has been damaged, what feedback was ignored, what power preserved the harm, and what intervention would restore life-capacity.

Flourishing is more than survival. Life does not only seek to continue. It seeks to express and develop its capacities. Human flourishing includes bodily health, emotional vitality, understanding, belonging, meaningful work, participation, creativity, moral agency, ecological belonging, spiritual depth, and the capacity to care for others (McMurtry, 2004–2011; Wilber, 2000). A society is life-coherent to the extent that it protects the basic conditions of life while enabling higher capacities to unfold.

This produces the central triad of the paper:

Continue.
Recover.
Flourish.

To continue is to preserve the basic integrity and viability of life. To recover is to repair harm, correct error, restore relationship, and learn from feedback. To flourish is to develop capacities for understanding, care, creativity, participation, wisdom, justice, peace, and ecological belonging.

This triad can be used across domains.

In medicine, the question is not only whether disease is treated, but whether the person's capacity to live is restored. In education, the question is not only whether credentials are granted, but whether understanding, agency, curiosity, and participation are enabled. In economics, the question is not only whether output increases, but whether real life-needs are met within ecological limits. In politics, the question is not only whether procedures are followed, but whether people can meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives. In religion, the question is not only whether love is proclaimed, but whether the conditions of love are

embodied. In artificial intelligence, the question is not only whether systems become more capable, but whether they help human and ecological life become more capable.

The conditions of life are not sentimental ideals. They are the real requirements of viability. When they are recognized, systems can become healing. When they are misrecognized, even well-intentioned systems can become harmful.

4. Religion, Love, and the Drift into Performance

Religion provides one of the most revealing test cases for the distinction between symbol and condition. Across traditions, founders, prophets, saints, sages, and reformers have taught love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, justice, humility, nonviolence, liberation, or awakened participation in reality. Yet religious institutions have often failed to organize power so that life can continue, recover, and flourish (Durkheim, 1915; Tillich, 1957).

The paradox is painful because the language of love remains while the conditions of love may be absent.

This is not an argument against religion. Religious traditions have generated immense goods: hospitals, schools, works of mercy, liberation movements, monastic disciplines, contemplative wisdom, community care, moral formation, artistic beauty, resistance to empire, and prophetic critique of injustice. Many people encounter in religious life a depth of meaning, healing, humility, service, and transformation that secular systems cannot easily replace.

The issue is not religion as such. The issue is capture.

Religious capture occurs when a living insight becomes organized primarily around the preservation of identity, authority, doctrine, ritual, boundary, purity, or institutional continuity rather than around the restoration of life. In its living form, religion can awaken people to the sacredness of life, the dignity of the other, the need for mercy, the limits of ego, and the call to serve. In its captured form, religion can preserve sacred symbols while leaving domination, exclusion, fear, shame, or structural harm intact.

The drift often begins subtly. A founder or prophetic figure speaks from a living encounter with truth, compassion, liberation, or divine presence. A community forms around the insight. Practices emerge to preserve the memory. Teachings are codified. Roles are institutionalized. Boundaries are drawn. Authority is established. Rituals are repeated. These developments are not necessarily harmful; without some form, wisdom can disappear. But the form becomes dangerous when it can no longer be corrected by the life it was meant to serve.

The symbol of love may remain, but the condition of care may be broken. The symbol of forgiveness may remain, but accountability may be refused. The symbol of holiness may remain, but the wounded may be silenced. The symbol of unity may remain, but difference may be suppressed. The symbol of obedience may remain, but conscience may be disabled. The symbol of salvation may remain, but actual life may be neglected.

Religion becomes performative when it proclaims love without restoring the conditions of love.

This distinction is crucial. Love as proclamation is not the same as love as life-enabling relation. Love becomes real when the other is allowed to appear as legitimate life, when the conditions necessary for the other's life are protected, when harm is repaired, when power becomes service,

and when the vulnerable are not sacrificed for institutional preservation (Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 1996; Maturana & Verden-Zöllner, 2008; McMurtry, 2004–2011).

In this sense, the life-test of religion is simple but demanding:

Does this religious form help life continue, recover, and flourish?

The question is not whether a tradition uses sacred language. The question is whether its practices and institutions restore life. Does it feed the hungry, protect children, accompany the sick, welcome the excluded, humble the powerful, repair harm, tell the truth, preserve the Earth, and form people capable of compassion, courage, and wisdom? Does it organize power as service, or does it use service as the language of power?

Every tradition faces this test. Every tradition contains resources for passing it and dangers of failing it.

The danger is intensified by what may be called the inner algorithms of religious capture: fear seeking security, shame seeking purification, belonging seeking boundary, status seeking sacred elevation, certainty seeking doctrinal closure, resentment seeking enemies, and power seeking divine authorization. These patterns are not unique to religion. They appear in politics, markets, media, nationalism, science, medicine, and technology. Religion is simply one of the clearest places where they can be seen because it deals explicitly with ultimate meaning.

The lesson is not that religion should be rejected, but that religion must be continually converted back to life. Sacred symbols must be returned to the conditions they were meant to serve. Ritual must return to relation. Doctrine must return to transformed life. Authority must return to service. Community must return to care. Prayer must return to embodied repair. Worship must return to justice, mercy, humility, and protection of the vulnerable.

This is where the tears of life become necessary.

A religious system can perform compassion while remaining defended against the actual wound. It can speak of love while refusing grief. It can denounce injustice while preserving its own innocence. It can offer charity while avoiding repair. It can bless suffering without changing the conditions that produce it.

The tears interrupt this defense. They return the system to wounded reality. They prevent love from remaining symbolic. They disclose that something living has been harmed and that the harm must be felt, named, and repaired (Rohr, 2025).

The movement from sacred performance to life-coherent repair therefore begins when religion, and every human system like it, allows the wound to reach the heart. Only then can love become more than symbol. Only then can power be reoriented toward life.

5. The Tears of Life: From Outrage to Prophetic Repair

If symbolic substitution is the pathology, the tears of life are the beginning of recovery.

Outrage often appears first. It is the moral shock that arises when harm becomes visible. Outrage says that something is wrong, that a boundary has been violated, that a false order has injured life. In this sense, outrage is not trivial. It may be the first sign that conscience has not yet been numbed. A society incapable of outrage may already be deeply misattuned.

Yet outrage is not enough.

Outrage can notice violation, but it does not necessarily restore relation. It can clarify harm, but it can also become performance, identity, superiority, revenge, or despair. It may expose the wound while hardening the heart. It may denounce the false order while reproducing the same logic of enemy-making, domination, and dehumanization. Outrage can begin the work, but if it remains untransformed, it may become another form of capture.

The tears of life mark a deeper movement.

Tears do not merely express sadness. In the sense used here, tears are the interior recognition that something living has been wounded. They are the conversion of outrage into attunement. They prevent analysis from becoming cold, activism from becoming hateful, religion from becoming performative, and politics from becoming tribal. Tears return the observer to the reality of life before the abstraction of the issue (Rohr, 2025).

This is why tears are not a retreat from reason. They are the recovery of reason's relation to wounded reality. A reason that cannot grieve may become instrumental. A spirituality that cannot grieve may become escapist. A politics that cannot grieve may become cruel. A technology that cannot be governed by grief may become indifferent to the life it disrupts.

The movement from outrage to tears is therefore not weakness. It is maturation.

Outrage says:

This should not be happening.

Tears say:

Something living has been harmed.

Prophetic repair says:

The false order must be named, and the conditions of life must be restored.

Prophecy, in this framework, is not primarily prediction. It is truthful naming. The prophetic function is to reveal where a system has become false to life. It asks what harm is being normalized, what symbol is being protected, what life is being sacrificed, what power is being conserved, and what repair is being refused (Rohr, 2025).

Prophecy becomes distorted when it loses compassion. It then becomes accusation without restoration. Compassion becomes distorted when it loses truth. It then becomes comfort without repair. The tears of life hold truth and compassion together. They allow harm to be named without making hatred the organizing field.

This matters because human systems are skilled at avoiding tears. They often move directly from harm to explanation, from suffering to management, from grief to public relations, from injury to litigation, from injustice to ideology, from ecological damage to mitigation language, from social breakdown to performance metrics. In each case, the wound is processed without being fully received.

When the wound is not received, repair remains partial.

A hospital may apologize without changing the conditions that exhausted its staff. A church may express regret without restructuring power. A government may consult without sharing decision-making. A corporation may publish sustainability reports without reducing ecological harm. A technology company may issue safety language without changing the incentives that drive capture. The symbol of concern replaces the condition of repair.

The tears of life interrupt this substitution. They ask the system to stop defending its innocence and face the wound.

The sequence may be stated as follows:

Wound → Outrage → Tears → Truthful Naming → Compassion → Repair.

The Arc from Wound to Repair

*Outrage notices violation, but tears restore attunement to wounded life.
Truthful naming and repair restore the missing conditions of life-capacity.*

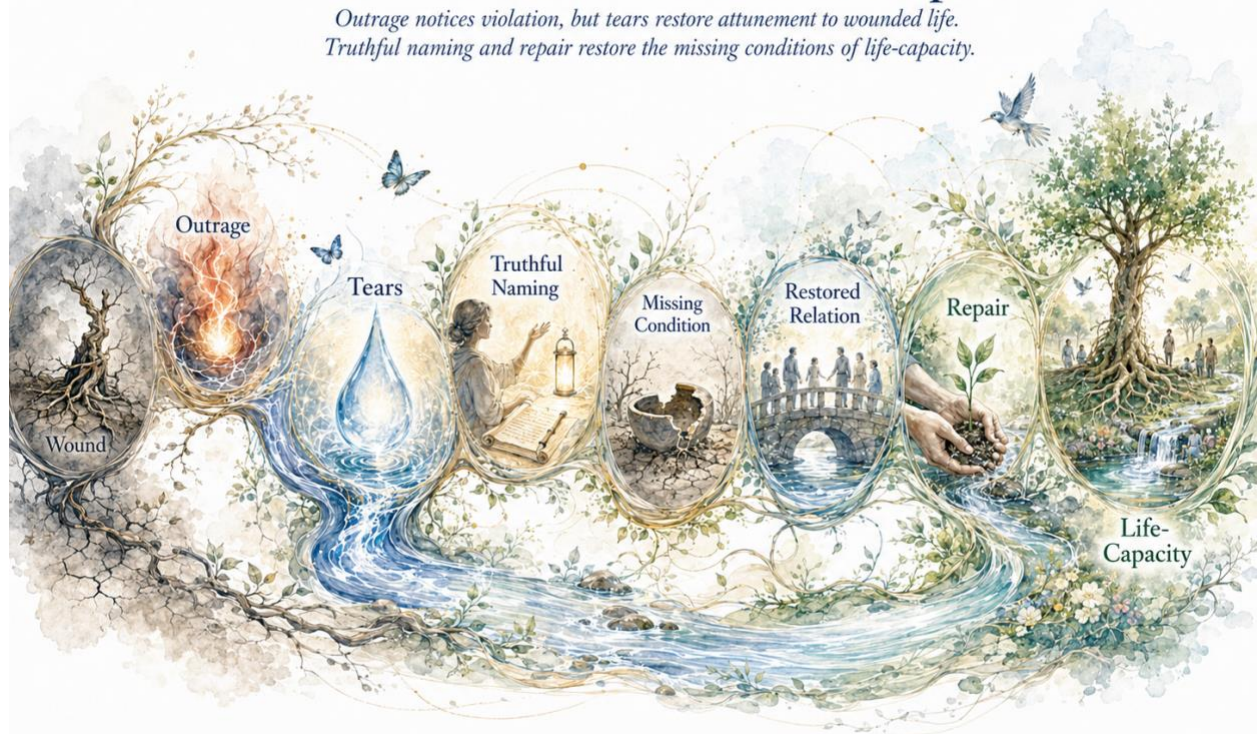


Figure 3. The Arc from Wound to Repair.

Outrage notices violation, but tears restore attunement to wounded life. Prophetic repair names the false order and restores the missing conditions of life-capacity.

The wound discloses that life has been harmed. Outrage registers violation. Tears restore attunement. Truthful naming identifies the false order. Compassion prevents dehumanization. Repair restores the conditions through which life can continue, recover, and flourish.

This sequence is not always linear. A community may move back and forth between outrage, grief, denial, analysis, and repair. A person may need time before tears can appear. An institution may resist truthful naming because its authority depends on symbolic self-preservation. But the sequence remains a useful grammar.

The tears of life make repair possible because they reveal the difference between solving a problem and restoring life. Problems can be solved externally. Life must be restored relationally. The question is not only what intervention will stop the visible symptom, but what condition has been broken, what relationship has been damaged, what feedback has been blocked, and what capacity must be restored (Galtung, 1969; McMurtry, 2004–2011).

This is the contemplative-prophetic heart of the framework.

To contemplate is to see without immediate possession, defense, or manipulation. To prophesy is to name what this seeing reveals about the false order. To repair is to act so that wounded life may recover its conditions. The tears of life join these movements.

Without contemplation, prophecy becomes reaction.

Without prophecy, contemplation becomes private consolation.

Without repair, both become performance.

The life-coherent path requires all three.

6. The Inner Algorithms of Capture

Before artificial intelligence, there are the algorithms within.

Human beings are not blank rational agents who encounter the world from a place of neutral perception. We are embodied, vulnerable, social, desiring, fearful, meaning-seeking beings. We seek safety, belonging, recognition, certainty, control, and hope (Wilber, 2000, 2006). These tendencies are not pathological in themselves. They are part of the human condition. They become dangerous when they operate unconsciously, become fused with power, and are institutionalized as systems that disable life.

These inner algorithms include fear seeking protection, loneliness seeking belonging, uncertainty seeking certainty, shame seeking purification, resentment seeking scapegoats, status seeking elevation, power seeking justification, suffering seeking meaning, vulnerability seeking salvation, and desire seeking amplification.

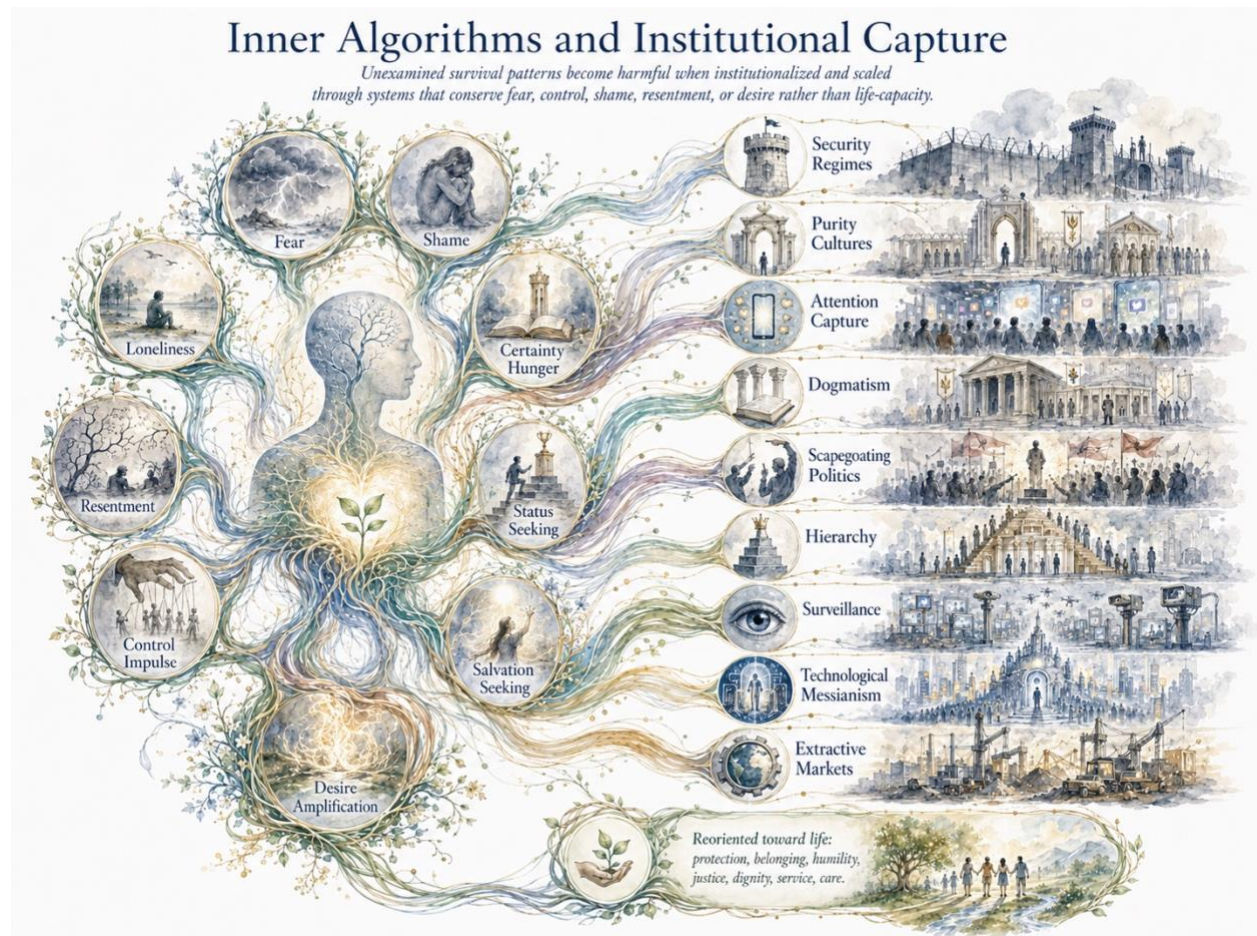


Figure 4. Inner Algorithms and Institutional Capture.

Human survival patterns become harmful when they are unexamined, institutionalized, and scaled through systems that conserve fear, control, shame, resentment, or desire rather than life-capacity.

Each begins from something understandable. Fear protects life from danger. Belonging sustains community. Certainty reduces anxiety. Shame may signal relational rupture. Status may reflect a need for recognition. Power may be needed for coordinated action. Meaning helps people endure suffering. Hope can keep life from despair.

But when these tendencies are unexamined, they can become distorted.

Fear can become permanent security logic.
Belonging can become exclusion.
Certainty can become dogmatism.
Shame can become purity culture.
Resentment can become scapegoating.
Status can become hierarchy.
Power can become domination.
Meaning can become ideology.
Hope can become false salvation.
Desire can become addiction.

The outer systems that harm life often institutionalize these inner algorithms.

A politics of fear may become a security regime. A religious community organized around shame may become a purity system. A market organized around desire amplification may become an attention economy. A culture organized around status may become a hierarchy of worth. A bureaucracy organized around control may become surveillance. A technological system organized around prediction may become behavioral management. An economy organized around accumulation may become extraction. A nation organized around grievance may become enemy-making.

This is why systems cannot be repaired only at the level of policy or design. The inner algorithms must also be named. Otherwise, new institutions reproduce old patterns with updated language.

A reform may speak of participation while preserving control. A technology may speak of empowerment while deepening dependency. A religion may speak of love while reproducing fear. A market may speak of freedom while enclosing life-conditions. A development project may speak of sustainability while conserving extraction. A health system may speak of care while organizing around throughput and compliance.

The same algorithm appears through different symbols.

This insight is crucial for the age of artificial intelligence. AI does not introduce capture from nowhere. It can externalize, accelerate, personalize, and monetize the inner algorithms already

operating in human beings and institutions. It can learn our fears, mirror our desires, amplify our resentments, confirm our identities, optimize our attention, and simulate authority. It can become an oracle for uncertainty, a companion for loneliness, a judge for insecurity, a priest for meaning, a marketplace for desire, or a weapon for domination.

The danger is not simply that machines may become too intelligent. The danger is that machine intelligence may become structurally coupled to immature human desire, institutional self-preservation, commercial extraction, and life-blind metrics (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023; Zuboff, 2019).

If fear governs the system, AI will scale fear.

If extraction governs the system, AI will scale extraction.

If attention capture governs the system, AI will scale addiction.

If resentment governs the system, AI will scale polarization.

If control governs the system, AI will scale surveillance.

If life-capacity governs the system, AI may support learning, care, healing, participation, and repair.

The decisive question is therefore not only technical alignment. It is life-alignment (UNESCO, 2022).

Aligned with what?

Aligned with whose values?

Aligned with what level of human maturity?

Aligned with what economic incentives?

Aligned with what institutional forms?

Aligned with what concept of life?

A system can be technically aligned with user preference while being life-disabling. It can efficiently satisfy desire while weakening agency. It can personalize information while narrowing perspective. It can optimize engagement while degrading attention. It can produce fluent language while weakening responsibility. It can simulate empathy while displacing relationship. It can increase productivity while exhausting the human and ecological conditions on which productivity depends.

The life-coherent response must therefore include inner, cultural, institutional, and technological work. It must ask not only how to regulate machines, but what human patterns machines are being trained to serve.

The inner algorithms of capture are not to be hated. They are to be seen, understood, disciplined, and integrated. Fear needs truthful protection. Belonging needs widened relation. Certainty needs humility. Shame needs healing. Resentment needs justice without dehumanization. Status needs dignity without hierarchy. Power needs service. Meaning needs truth. Hope needs grounding. Desire needs orientation to life.

This is part of what it means to reorient power to life.

7. Direct, Structural, and Cultural Harm

Harm is often recognized only when it becomes visible as direct injury: a body wounded, a person excluded, a child neglected, a community displaced, a river poisoned, a right violated, a war declared. Direct harm matters. It is the most visible form of life-disablement (Galtung, 1969).

But many of the deepest harms are not immediately visible. They are built into arrangements that predictably reduce life-capacity while appearing normal, legal, efficient, or necessary. These are structural harms. They include systems that deprive people of adequate food, water, health care, housing, education, safety, participation, ecological protection, or meaningful work. They also include systems that externalize ecological damage, concentrate power, privatize life-conditions, or deny communities the capacity to shape their own futures.

Still deeper is cultural harm: the narratives, doctrines, rituals, metrics, images, and meanings that make direct and structural harm appear acceptable (Galtung, 1990). Cultural harm teaches people not to see harm as harm. It tells them that poverty is personal failure, that ecological destruction is progress, that exclusion is order, that domination is security, that extraction is development, that burnout is productivity, that silence is unity, and that dependence is innovation.

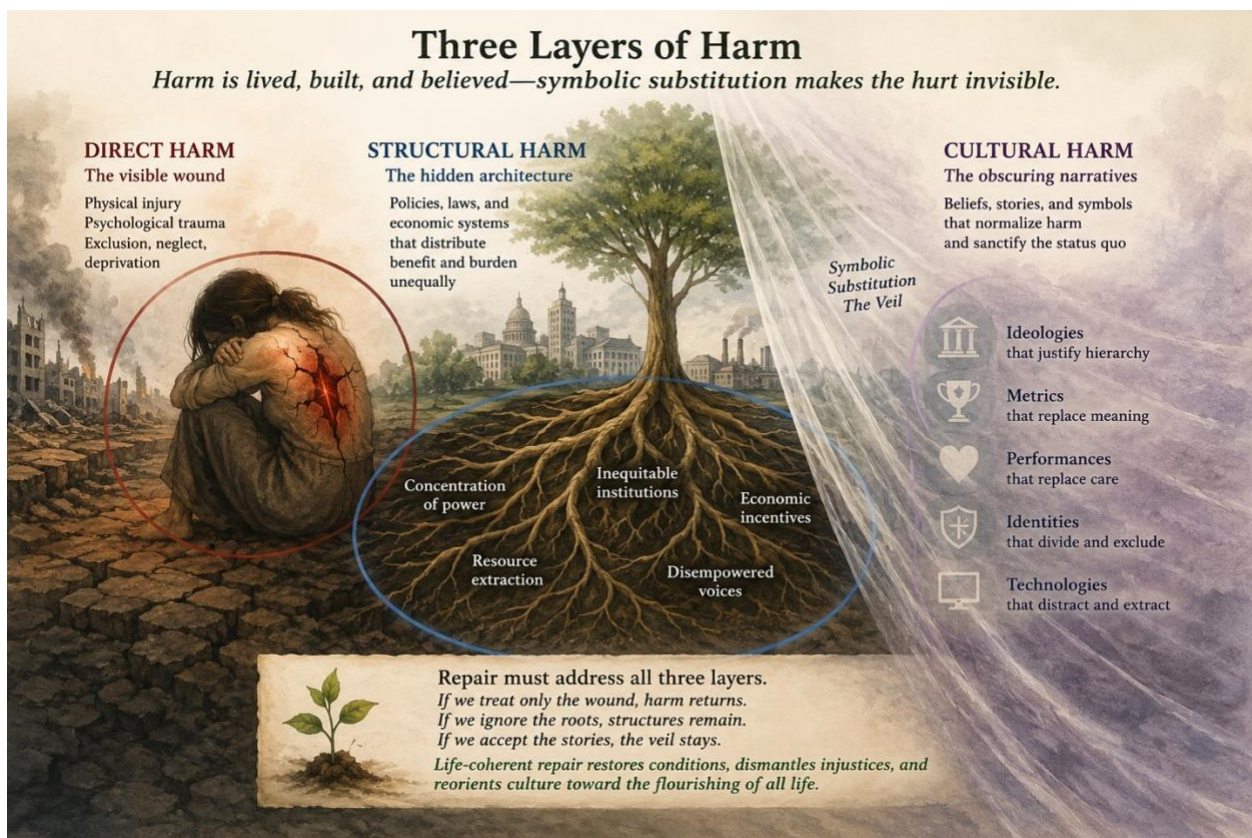


Figure 5. Direct, Structural, and Cultural Harm.

Harm becomes durable when visible injury is supported by structural disablement and cultural meanings that normalize or conceal the loss of life-capacity.

Symbolic substitution is one of the most powerful forms of cultural harm.

When the symbol of love replaces the condition of care, harm can continue under sacred language. When the symbol of value replaces life-value, extraction can continue under economic rationality. When the symbol of security replaces the condition of trust, coercion can continue under protection. When the symbol of intelligence replaces wisdom, manipulation can continue under innovation. When the symbol of sustainability replaces ecological repair, enclosure can continue under green imagery. When the symbol of consultation replaces participation, exclusion can continue under procedural legitimacy.

Cultural harm works by making the life-test difficult to ask.

A system that has captured language can define its own success. It can call displacement “development,” extraction “investment,” dependency “partnership,” surveillance “safety,” automation “efficiency,” and abandonment “personal responsibility.” Once language is captured, harm does not need to hide. It can appear in public as necessity.

The life-coherent framework interrupts this by returning to the condition question:

What does life require here, and is that requirement being met?

This question exposes direct, structural, and cultural harm at once.

If a patient is treated but not restored to life-capacity, something is missing. If a community is consulted but cannot influence decisions, participation is symbolic. If an economy grows while people become more insecure and ecosystems degrade, growth is concealing harm. If a religious institution proclaims love while the wounded remain unprotected, love is symbolic. If AI expands productivity while weakening attention, agency, truth, and ecological viability, intelligence is substituting for wisdom.

Harm may therefore be defined as any pattern that predictably disables life from continuing, recovering, or flourishing (Galtung, 1969, 1990; McMurtry, 2004–2011, 2013).

This definition includes direct violence, but it is not limited to violence in the narrow sense. It includes neglect, deprivation, exclusion, misrecognition, institutional betrayal, ecological degradation, cultural erasure, technological capture, spiritual bypassing, and the organized refusal of feedback from the harmed.

The organized refusal of feedback is especially important. Harm persists when systems do not have to listen to the life they damage. This is why voice, participation, transparency, accountability, and ecological feedback are not optional virtues. They are life-conditions for social learning.

When feedback is blocked, systems become self-referential. They listen to their own metrics, rituals, doctrines, shareholders, bureaucratic requirements, or machine outputs rather than to the life affected by their actions. They may become more efficient while becoming less truthful.

The repair of harm requires reopening feedback channels. The harmed must be able to speak. The ecological consequences must be counted. The future must be represented. The invisible labor must be seen. The excluded must be heard. The institutional incentives must be named. The sacred symbols must be tested against life.

In this sense, peace is not merely the absence of direct violence. Peace is the presence of conditions through which life can continue, recover, and flourish (Galtung, 1969). A society at peace is not one without conflict. It is one capable of transforming conflict without disabling life. It can receive feedback, name harm, repair relationships, correct structures, and change the cultural meanings that normalized injury.

The life-coherent grammar therefore deepens the diagnosis of harm:

Direct harm wounds life visibly.
Structural harm disables life systemically.
Cultural harm misnames or normalizes the disablement.
Symbolic substitution protects the misnaming.
Repair restores the conditions of life.

8. The Life-Coherent Repair Framework

Good intentions do not repair harm by themselves. Neither do ideals, analysis, technology, ritual, outrage, or policy. Each may contribute, but repair requires a disciplined movement from wounded life to restored condition (Capra, 1996; Galtung, 1969; McMurtry, 2004–2011; Rohr, 2025).

Table 2. From Performative Care to Life-Coherent Repair.

Performative Mode	Hidden Substitution	Life-Condition Required	Repair Question
“We care”	Statement replaces protection	Safety, care, accountability	Who is still unprotected?
“We consulted”	Procedure replaces participation	Shared power, voice, feedback	Who can actually influence the outcome?
“We innovated”	Novelty replaces wisdom	Discernment, responsibility, life-benefit	What capacity is actually restored?
“We apologized”	Regret replaces repair	Truth, restitution, changed conditions	What has materially changed?
“We are sustainable”	Green symbol replaces ecological repair	Regeneration, limits, ecological integrity	Is the life-ground recovering?
“We optimized”	Efficiency replaces life-capacity	Health, agency, relationship	What human or ecological cost is hidden?
“We are inclusive”	Representation replaces belonging	Voice, dignity, structural access	Who remains outside the conditions of participation?

This paper proposes a seven-step life-coherent repair framework.

8.1 See the Wound

The first step is to ask:

What life is suffering here?

This question must be asked before ideology, blame, solution, or institutional defense. It asks us to identify the living beings, communities, ecosystems, relationships, and future capacities that are affected.

The wound may appear as illness, exhaustion, poverty, exclusion, ecological damage, mistrust, displacement, loneliness, spiritual despair, cultural erasure, political alienation, or loss of agency. It may also appear indirectly as numbness, cynicism, fragmentation, violence, addiction, or dependency.

To see the wound is to refuse abstraction. It is to return the inquiry to life.

8.2 Allow the Tears

The second step is to ask:

Can the wound be felt without denial, performance, rage, or despair?

This step is necessary because systems often avoid the wound through explanation, technical language, institutional self-protection, moral superiority, or spiritual bypass. Allowing the tears means allowing reality to matter.

This does not require public emotional display. It requires attunement. A policymaker, physician, teacher, priest, technologist, economist, or citizen may “allow the tears” by letting the suffering of life interrupt the automatic defense of the system.

Without this step, repair remains procedural. With it, repair becomes human.

8.3 Name the False Order

The third step is to ask:

What story, symbol, ritual, metric, technology, or institution is making the harm seem normal?

This is the prophetic step. It identifies the false order.

A false order may call exploitation opportunity, enclosure development, domination security, dependency innovation, exhaustion productivity, silence unity, or exclusion purity. It may be religious, economic, technological, bureaucratic, political, medical, or educational.

Naming the false order does not mean demonizing individuals. It means identifying the pattern that makes harm appear legitimate.

8.4 Identify the Missing Condition

The fourth step is to ask:

What does life require here that is absent, blocked, enclosed, distorted, or substituted?

This is the practical diagnostic step.

The missing condition may be food, water, land, shelter, rest, safety, care, trust, truthful information, participation, ecological protection, education, meaningful work, cultural continuity, spiritual belonging, institutional accountability, or time to heal.

Repair cannot proceed until the missing condition is named. Otherwise, systems may offer symbolic substitutes: consultation without power, apology without restitution, treatment without healing, innovation without wisdom, charity without justice, growth without development.

8.5 Trace the Conserving Pattern

The fifth step is to ask:

What inner algorithm, institutional incentive, cultural story, or power structure is preserving the harm?

This step identifies why harm persists despite evidence.

A system may be conserving profit, authority, status, identity, comfort, purity, security, growth, control, reputation, or bureaucratic continuity. It may also be conserving fear, shame, resentment, or certainty at the collective level.

Unless the conserving pattern is named, reform may remain superficial. The visible symptom may change while the deeper pattern continues.

8.6 Restore the Life-Relation

The sixth step is to ask:

What relationship must be repaired?

Harm is rarely only a defect in a mechanism. It is usually a rupture in relation: person to body, person to community, community to land, institution to citizen, economy to ecology, religion to life, technology to wisdom, power to service, present generation to future life.

Restoring the life-relation may require apology, restitution, redesign, redistribution, listening, participation, ecological restoration, institutional reform, cultural truth-telling, or the creation of new commons.

The key is that repair must be relational, not merely symbolic.

8.7 Make the Repair Real

The seventh step is to ask:

What minimal sufficient intervention would restore life-capacity without creating new harm?

This principle avoids both passivity and domination. A life-coherent intervention is not necessarily the largest, most expensive, most visible, or most technologically advanced

intervention. It is the intervention that restores the system's own capacity for regulation, learning, relationship, and development.

The practical sequence is:

Restore the missing condition.
Repair the broken relationship.
Unblock the feedback.
Rename the harm truthfully.
Remove the disabling constraint.
Allow life to reorganize.

This is non-forcing action. It does not mean doing nothing. It means intervening at the point where life can regain its own capacity to continue, recover, and flourish.

The seven steps can be applied at many scales. In clinical care, they ask what capacity the patient has lost and what conditions would restore it. In education, they ask what conditions allow understanding and belonging to emerge. In religion, they ask whether sacred symbols are embodied in care, justice, and repair. In development, they ask whether projects strengthen or enclose life-conditions. In politics, they ask whether institutions can receive feedback from the harmed. In AI governance, they ask whether systems support human and ecological life-capacity or intensify capture.

The framework is not a formula that eliminates judgment. It is a discipline of attention. It helps ensure that repair remains accountable to life (McMurtry, 2004–2011; Wilber, 2006).

9. Artificial Intelligence: Tool, Oracle, Idol, Enclosure, or Commons?

Artificial intelligence is the emerging global test case for the life-coherent framework because it intensifies the central issue of this paper: the difference between symbol and condition.

AI can generate symbols of intelligence at scale. It can produce language, images, advice, summaries, predictions, analysis, companionship, tutoring, diagnosis, design, and simulation. It can appear helpful, patient, knowledgeable, responsive, and authoritative. It can feel like tool, teacher, friend, consultant, priest, therapist, oracle, or judge.

But symbolic intelligence is not wisdom. Fluency is not truth. Personalization is not care. Prediction is not understanding. Automation is not liberation. Optimization is not flourishing.

The question is not whether AI is impressive. The question is whether it supports the conditions through which life continues, recovers, and flourishes (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

AI may occupy at least five roles: tool, oracle, idol, enclosure, or commons.

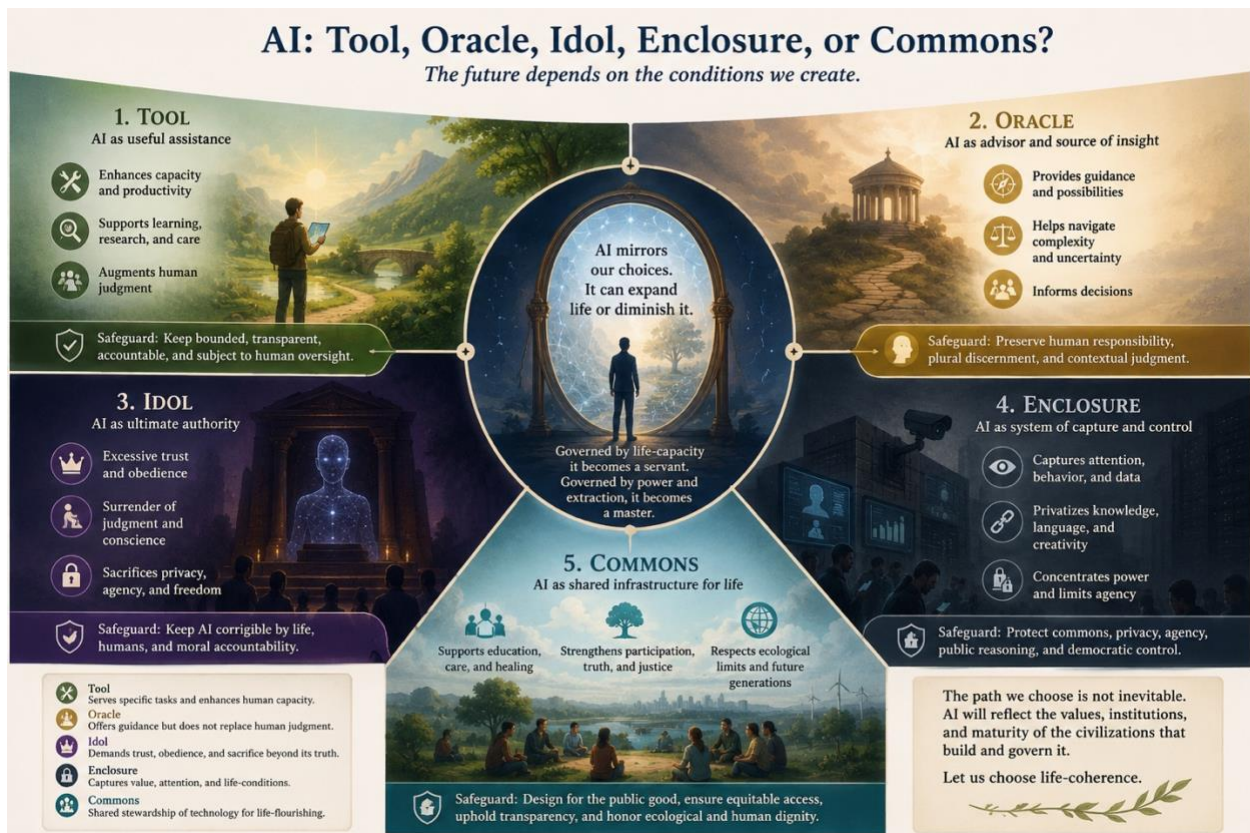


Figure 6. AI as Tool, Oracle, Idol, Enclosure, or Commons.

Artificial intelligence becomes life-coherent when governed as a bounded tool or life-serving commons. It becomes harmful when it functions as oracle, idol, or enclosure detached from the conditions of life.

Table 3. AI as Tool, Oracle, Idol, Enclosure, or Commons.

AI Mode	Human Need Addressed	Primary Risk	Life-Coherent Safeguard
Tool	Assistance, access, productivity	Overuse, deskilling, hidden dependency	Keep bounded, transparent, accountable
Oracle	Certainty, advice, orientation	Surrender of judgment	Preserve human responsibility and plural discernment
Idol	Salvation, authority, mastery	Excessive trust, sacrifice, obedience	Keep AI corrigible by life and accountable to humans
Enclosure	Convenience, personalization, scale	Capture of attention, language, labor, knowledge, judgment	Protect commons, agency, privacy, public reasoning
Commons	Shared learning, care, repair	Governance failure, unequal access	Public-interest design, democratic oversight, ecological limits

9.1 AI as Tool

AI as tool is bounded, transparent, accountable, and subordinate to human and ecological life-conditions. It supports specific purposes without claiming ultimate authority (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024; National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). It can assist with translation, accessibility, education, diagnosis, organization, research, creativity, public reasoning, environmental monitoring, and care coordination.

As tool, AI remains answerable to human judgment, lived experience, institutional accountability, ecological limits, and democratic oversight. It is evaluated by whether it enhances life-capacity rather than merely increasing speed, scale, profit, or dependency.

The tool form is not trivial. Properly governed, AI could support learning, reduce administrative burdens, improve access to knowledge, assist clinicians, help communities analyze risks, enhance public participation, and make complex systems more understandable. But the tool must remain tool.

9.2 AI as Oracle

AI becomes oracle when it is consulted for orientation, certainty, prediction, decision, and meaning. This is not always wrong. Human beings have always sought guidance from sources

beyond immediate individual knowledge: elders, scriptures, experts, traditions, science, law, and collective deliberation.

The danger begins when consultation becomes surrender.

AI as oracle can weaken responsibility if users outsource judgment. It can narrow imagination if generated answers define the field of possibility. It can simulate certainty where humility is required. It can produce confident language without lived accountability. It can become the voice people turn to before they turn to their own conscience, community, tradition, body, land, or relationships.

A life-coherent use of AI as advisory oracle would require strong safeguards: transparency, contestability, plural sources, human responsibility, contextual judgment, and explicit recognition that machine output is not wisdom.

9.3 AI as Idol

AI becomes idol when excessive trust, sacrifice, and obedience are given to machine systems beyond their life-serving truth.

Idolatry here does not mean worship in a narrow religious sense. It means treating a finite system as ultimate. AI becomes idol when its outputs are protected from correction by life, when its authority overrides human dignity, when its efficiency justifies harm, or when people sacrifice privacy, labor, energy, water, attention, culture, judgment, and agency to preserve its expansion.

Signs of AI idolatry include the displacement of human responsibility, the weakening of conscience, the treatment of model output as unquestionable, the replacement of relationship by simulation, the reduction of education to automated response, the replacement of institutional judgment by algorithmic recommendation, and the acceptance of ecological costs as inevitable sacrifices to progress.

The idol form reveals the central danger of symbolic substitution:

Intelligence as symbol replaces wisdom as condition.

9.4 AI as Enclosure

AI becomes enclosure when it captures and privatizes the conditions of human meaning-making (Zuboff, 2019).

Land enclosure restricted access to land. Financial enclosure captures value through debt and claims. AI enclosure may capture attention, language, creativity, knowledge, labor, education, culture, public reasoning, and institutional judgment.

This form is especially serious because AI operates within the medium through which humans bring forth worlds: language, image, narrative, classification, memory, prediction, and recommendation. If these media become governed by private incentives, surveillance architectures, attention capture, or centralized control, then AI is not merely another technology. It becomes infrastructure for world-making.

AI enclosure may appear as convenience. It may offer effortless answers, personalized companionship, automated productivity, frictionless decision-making, and endless content. Yet it may weaken the conditions of wisdom: attention, dialogue, embodied learning, silence, responsibility, public deliberation, ecological awareness, and shared reality.

The life-coherent question is therefore:

Does AI expand human agency, understanding, participation, and care, or does it capture the conditions through which these capacities develop?

9.5 AI as Commons

AI becomes commons when governed as shared life-serving infrastructure.

A life-coherent AI commons would not mean unrestricted use or naïve openness. It would mean that AI systems are designed, governed, and evaluated by their contribution to life-capacity. Such systems would support truthful feedback, public education, care, ecological responsibility, cultural plurality, democratic participation, local knowledge, human agency, and repair of harm.

AI as commons would require clear limits. It would not be allowed to optimize engagement at the cost of attention, productivity at the cost of human development, prediction at the cost of freedom, personalization at the cost of shared reality, or efficiency at the cost of ecological viability (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024; National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

It would require public-interest governance, transparent accountability, community participation, ecological accounting, protection of vulnerable groups, preservation of human judgment, and the ability to contest machine-mediated decisions.

The core test would remain:

Does this AI system help life continue, recover, and flourish?

9.6 Bridge to a Full AI Paper

This section cannot exhaust the AI question. It establishes the frame for a subsequent application.

The next paper should ask:

Will AI become tool, oracle, idol, enclosure, or commons?

Its central thesis would be:

Artificial intelligence becomes life-coherent only when governed by the real conditions of human and ecological life-capacity. It becomes harmful when symbolic intelligence is aligned with commercial extraction, institutional control, immature human desire, and life-blind metrics.

The present paper therefore treats AI not as a separate topic, but as the most urgent contemporary test of the deeper pattern: whether humanity can distinguish symbols from conditions before its most powerful symbolic technology becomes a planetary system of capture.

10. Reorienting Power to Life

The task is not to reject religion, markets, politics, medicine, education, technology, or artificial intelligence. Each can serve life. Each can also become captured. The question is whether these systems remain corrigible by life.

A system is corrigible by life when it can receive feedback from the life it affects, name harm truthfully, restore missing conditions, repair broken relationships, and change the patterns it has been conserving. A system becomes dangerous when it protects its symbols, metrics, authority, or growth from correction by wounded life.

The conversion required is therefore not merely moral. It is structural, cultural, institutional, ecological, developmental, and spiritual.

Religion must be converted from sacred performance to embodied repair.

Economics must be converted from money-sequence to life-value.

Politics must be converted from representation as symbol to participation as condition.

Medicine must be converted from treatment as output to healing as restored capacity.

Education must be converted from credentialing to understanding and agency.

Technology must be converted from control and scale to wisdom and service.

AI must be converted from oracle, idol, or enclosure to life-serving commons.

This conversion begins with the question:

What does life require here?

It continues through the life-coherent repair framework:

See the wound.

Allow the tears.

Name the false order.

Identify the missing condition.

Trace the conserving pattern.

Restore the life-relation.

Make the repair real.

The Life-Coherent Repair Cycle

A continual spiral of truth, compassion, and restoration.



Figure 7. The Life-Coherent Repair Cycle.

Life-coherent repair is a continuing discipline of recognizing wounded life, receiving feedback, naming symbolic substitution, restoring conditions, and testing whether life-capacity is actually enabled.

This is not a final theory. It is a discipline of recognition and repair. It remains open to correction because every perspective is partial, every institution can drift, every symbol can become detached, and every system can become self-protective (Wilber, 2000, 2006). The framework must therefore apply to itself. It too must ask whether it enables life-capacity, receives feedback, and remains responsive to the life it seeks to serve.

The deepest danger is not that humanity lacks symbols of love, intelligence, value, progress, or salvation. These are abundant. The danger is that symbols become substitutes. When that happens, human beings can speak of love while preserving harm, speak of intelligence while weakening wisdom, speak of progress while degrading the life-ground, and speak of salvation while refusing repair.

The tears of life return us to the real.

They are not the end of thought. They are the beginning of truthful thought. They are not the abandonment of action. They are the purification of action. They are not private emotion alone. They are the sign that the wound of life has broken through the defenses of abstraction, ideology, performance, and control.

Where the wound is seen, the false order can be named.
Where the tears are allowed, compassion can remain alive.
Where the missing condition is identified, repair can become practical.
Where the broken relationship is restored, life can recover.
Where power is reoriented to life, flourishing can begin again.

The final formulation is simple:

Life-coherence is the practice of recognizing what life requires, restoring what harm has broken, and organizing power so that life can continue, recover, and flourish.

This is the work before religion, politics, economics, medicine, education, technology, and artificial intelligence. It is also the work within them.

The symbol must return to the condition.
The system must return to service.
Power must return to life.
And the tears of life must become repair.

References

- Capra, F. (1996). *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. Anchor Books.
- Durkheim, É. (1915). *The elementary forms of the religious life: A study in religious sociology* (J. W. Swain, Trans.). George Allen & Unwin. (Original work published 1912)
- European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024). *Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No. 300/2008, (EU) No. 167/2013, (EU) No. 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act)*. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 2024/1689.
<https://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj>
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291–305.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- Maturana, H. R., & Varela, F. J. (1980). *Autopoiesis and cognition: The realization of the living*. D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Maturana, H. R., & Verden-Zöllner, G. (1996). Biology of love. In G. Opp & F. Peterander (Eds.), *Focus Heilpädagogik* [Focus: Therapeutic pedagogy] (pp. 119–127). Ernst Reinhardt.
- Maturana, H. R., & Verden-Zöllner, G. (2008). *The origin of humanness in the biology of love* (P. Bunnell, Ed.). Imprint Academic.
- McMurtry, J. (2004–2011). What is good? What is bad? The value of all values through time, place and theories. In J. McMurtry (Ed.), *Philosophy and world problems* (Vols. I–III). EOLSS Publishers.
- McMurtry, J. (2013). *The cancer stage of capitalism: From crisis to cure* (2nd ed.). Pluto Press.
- National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2023). *Artificial intelligence risk management framework (AI RMF 1.0)*. U.S. Department of Commerce.
<https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.AI.100-1>
- Rohr, R. (2025). *The tears of things: Prophetic wisdom for an age of outrage*. Convergent Books.
- Tillich, P. (1957). *Dynamics of faith*. Harper & Row.

UNESCO. (2022). *Recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence*. UNESCO.

Wilber, K. (2000). *A theory of everything: An integral vision for business, politics, science, and spirituality*. Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Integral Books.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.

Author Bio

Dr. Bichara Sahely is a physician, public health practitioner, and independent scholar from St. Kitts and Nevis. His work explores life-coherence as an integrative framework for medicine, governance, economics, law, spirituality, peace, and ecological repair. Drawing from living systems theory, life-value philosophy, peace research, integral development, and Caribbean/SIDS realities, his writing seeks to clarify how human systems can be reoriented toward the conditions that allow life to continue, recover, and flourish.

AI Use Statement

This white paper was developed through an iterative human–AI collaboration between Dr. Bichara Sahely and ChatGPT. The author provided the guiding inquiry, conceptual direction, ethical commitments, and substantive judgment. ChatGPT assisted with synthesis, drafting, organization, refinement of language, citation architecture, and structural editing. The resulting work reflects the author’s intellectual authorship, final discernment, and responsibility for publication.

Back Cover Synopsis

Human systems often preserve the symbols of love, intelligence, progress, order, value, and salvation while failing to restore the real conditions through which life continues, recovers, and flourishes. Religion may proclaim love while conserving exclusion. Markets may proclaim value while degrading life-value. Politics may preserve representation while weakening participation. Medicine may offer treatment while neglecting healing. Artificial intelligence may simulate intelligence while enclosing attention, language, judgment, and agency.

The Tears of Life develops a life-coherent framework for distinguishing symbolic performance from real repair. Drawing on living systems theory, peace research, life-value philosophy, integral development, ecological systems thinking, and prophetic spirituality, it proposes a practical grammar: see the wound, allow the tears, name the false order, identify the missing condition, trace the conserving pattern, restore the life-relation, and make the repair real.

The central question is simple but demanding: does this system help life continue, recover, and flourish? Where the wound is seen, where the tears are allowed, and where the conditions of life are restored, power can return to service and life can begin again.