GIAMMARIO BATTAGLIA

Capitalism of meaning

Beyond the Isolated Individual and the Blind State

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was written in continuity with years of reflection on law, governance, social sustainability, institutional fragility, and the human meaning of decision. It stands at the intersection of many conversations, experiences, and fields of work: philosophy and public policy, legal practice and civic observation, technological transformation and the enduring question of what makes a society politically inhabitable.

I owe a debt to those intellectual traditions that made this inquiry possible: to civil economy and the idea of public happiness; to the severe clarity of political thinkers who understood that power without form becomes de-

structive; to those who confronted the anthropology of rivalry, sacrifice, and institutional breakdown; and to all those who have insisted, against the flattening tendencies of our age, that the human question cannot be reduced to management, metrics, or optimization.

I am equally indebted to the practical worlds from which many of the book's concerns arise: public institutions struggling to decide under pressure, territories bearing the weight of restructuring, legal systems forced to confront complexity without losing responsibility, and the growing frontier where artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and strategic power challenge inherited categories of legitimacy and citizenship.

This work also belongs to the broader intellectual and institutional path that has animated the Human Economic Forum and the long development of *L'Architetto del Senso*. Without that wider effort to think the relation between economy, governance, responsibility, and human

meaning, this book would not have taken the form it has.

Finally, this book is written for those who refuse both resignation and simplification: for those who know that the present crisis is real, that the old language is no longer enough, and that the future will need more than critique—it will need institutions, truth, reciprocity, and courage.

DEDICATION

To all those who still believe that a civilization is measured not only by what it can build, but by whether human beings can still recognize themselves in what has been built.

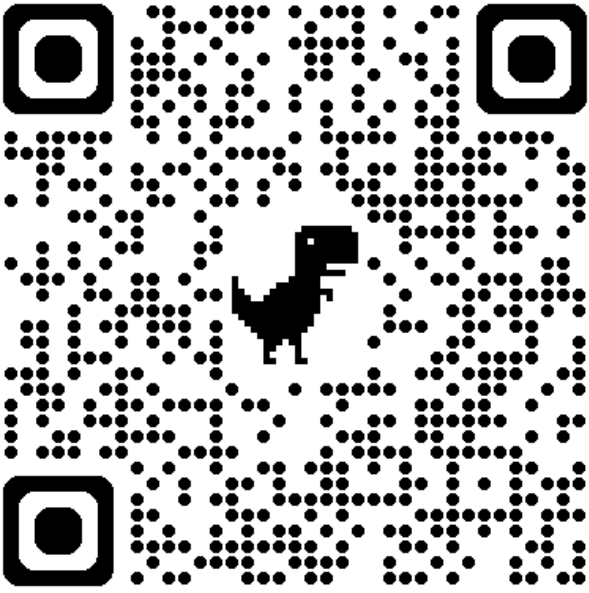
EPIGRAPH

Civilizations do not fail only when they are defeated from outside. They also fail when they become unrecognizable from within.

A Systemic Response to the Crisis of Trust and Cohesion in the Age of the Technoright

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Capitalism of Meaning

WARTIME DISPATCH

N° 001 — March 2026 | Second Edition, Expanded

THE WAR IS ALREADY HERE

A Field Report on Algorithmic Power in the Age of Undeclared Conflict

What follows is not a forecast. It is a dispatch from the present. The scenarios described in this book — the erosion of human oversight, the privatization of lethal decision-making, the reduction of citizens to data profiles — are no longer theoretical warnings. They are documented facts, drawn from court records, defense contracts, intelligence investigations, battlefield reports, and judicial proceedings filed between 2013 and March 2026. The reader is asked to hold this evidence in mind before proceeding to the analysis.

■ CASE FILE I

Lavender and The Gospel: The First Algorithmic Kill Lists

Gaza Strip, October 2023 – present

In the opening weeks of Israel's military campaign in Gaza following October 7, 2023, two artificial intelligence systems were deployed at an un-

precedented scale. The Gospel — Habsora in Hebrew — automatically generated lists of buildings, infrastructures, and civilian structures designated as bombing targets. Lavender, a parallel system, assigned each of the approximately two million adult males in Gaza a numerical score indicating the estimated probability of their affiliation with Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

According to investigations by +972 Magazine and Local Call, based on the testimony of thirteen Israeli intelligence officers, Lavender's list at one point named 37,000 individuals. The approval protocol before authorizing an airstrike against a "junior operative" identified by the system consisted of a single mandatory check: verifying that the target was male. This verification took approximately twenty seconds.

> *"Because of the scope and magnitude, the protocol was that even if you don't know for sure that the machine is right, you know that statistically it's fine." —*

IDF officer, testimony to +972 Magazine, April 2024

The system's accepted error rate was ten percent: one in every ten individuals on the list was not a combatant. Applied to 37,000 names, this generates an expected floor of 3,700 civilian deaths by algorithmic error alone, before any human decision is made. The system also provided automatic calculations of "collateral damage": for low-ranking targets, up to twenty civilian deaths per strike were pre-authorized as statistically acceptable.

A third tool, Where's Daddy?, tracked individuals' real-time movements via mobile phone data, triggering an alert — and a strike authorization — when the target entered their family home. Human Rights Watch, reviewing the digital infrastructure, found that the targeting algorithms relied on machine learning trained on data that could not be audited, verified, or contested by any external body.

37,000

individuals on algorithmic kill lists

20 sec

official human review time per target

20

pre-authorized civilian deaths per “junior” target

Sources: +972 Magazine / Local Call, April 2024; Human Rights Watch, September 2024; Wikipedia — AI-assisted targeting in the Gaza Strip, February 2026

■ CASE FILE II

Palantir and the Privatization of the Kill Chain

United States / Global, 2017 – present

Palantir Technologies was founded with funding from the CIA’s venture capital arm. Today it is the primary contractor for Project Maven — the Pentagon’s AI backbone — which processes drone footage and satellite imagery to generate real-time targeting recommendations across U.S. military ope-

rations in the Middle East. In March 2024, the U.S. Army awarded Palantir a $178 million contract to build next-generation “Tactical Intelligence Targeting Access Node” (TITAN) ground systems, described as AI-defined platforms designed to accelerate the link between sensors and weapons. The first systems were delivered in March 2025, on schedule and on budget.

In Q4 2025, Palantir reported $570 million in U.S. Government revenue, up 66% year-over-year. Full-year 2026 guidance projects $7.2 billion in total revenue, with 61% growth. The company’s market valuation rests on a logic its own CEO has made explicit: “The West will very likely face a three-front war against Russia, China, and Iran,” Alex Karp told the New York Times in August 2024, “and autonomous weapons systems of the kind Palantir builds will be decisive.”

A 2025 U.S. Army internal assessment flagged that the battlefield communications system jointly designed by Palantir and Anduril constituted a “black box”: it was technically impossible to deter-

mine whether unauthorized users could access its applications and data, or to audit the logic driving its targeting recommendations. The same system is being actively expanded to allied nations.

Once military command and control is built on a single private platform, the switching cost is no longer financial — it is existential. Nations become structurally dependent on a corporation with its own geopolitical agenda.

$7.2B

Palantir's projected 2026 revenue, mostly from defense

+66%

year-on-year growth in U.S. Government contracts, Q4 2025

0

elected officials with oversight over its targeting algorithms

Sources: Defense News, March 2025; CNBC, March 2025; 24/7 Wall

St., March 2026; Brennan Center for Justice, 2025

■ CASE FILE III

Ukraine: The World's First Real-Time AI War Laboratory

Eastern Ukraine / Global defense industry, 2022 – present

Since February 2022, the war in Ukraine has become what a senior U.S. defense official calls "a laboratory for the next decade." AI-equipped drones now account for between 70% and 80% of battlefield casualties. AI guidance systems have increased first-person-view drone strike accuracy from 30–50% to approximately 80%. Ukraine set a target for at least half of its 2025 drone purchases to carry AI guidance — an increase from 0.5% to 50% in a single year.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov declared in late 2024: "The future of warfare belongs to autonomous systems. Our objective is to

increase the level of autonomy in drones and other combat platforms so they can detect targets faster, analyze battlefield conditions, and support real-time decision-making." In July 2025, Ukraine launched the 'Test in Ukraine' initiative, inviting Western arms manufacturers to test autonomous weapons systems in active combat against Russian forces, with real casualties and real data.

On March 13, 2026 — the day before this book went to press — Ukraine formally opened its battlefield AI combat data to international defense companies and allied governments, offering access to millions of labeled combat videos collected in real time from frontline soldiers. No international regulatory framework governs what those partners may do with the data.

Russia is matching pace. In 2024 it deployed AI-upgraded Shahed drones that navigate via Ukrainian cell towers, evading electronic warfare. Putin has directed military AI cooperation with China. Both sides are learning, in real time, how to remove the human from the loop.

70–80%

of battlefield casualties now caused by drones

5M+

drones deployed by Ukraine alone

0

binding international treaties on autonomous lethal weapons

Sources: Modern War Institute, January 2025; Breaking Defense, September 2025; Defense News, March 13 2026; U.S. Army War College War Room, August 2025

■ CASE FILE IV

The Architecture of Behavioral Control: China's Social Credit System

People's Republic of China, 2014 – present

China's National Credit Information Sharing Platform had collected over 80.7 billion records by early 2025, covering approximately 180 million businesses and hundreds of millions of individuals. The system's logic is simple: compliance with state norms is rewarded with accelerated access to loans, faster administrative processing, and preferential treatment in public procurement. Non-compliance results in blacklisting.

As of September 2025, approximately 200,000 additional individuals had been blacklisted in a single year, 46% of them due to contractual disputes. Blacklisted individuals face restrictions on air and rail travel, exclusion from high-prestige employment, and public shaming via digital screens. The March 2025 Party guidelines extended credit monitoring to new sectors — real estate, internet services, human resources, energy — and tied professional licenses in finance, healthcare, and education directly to credit scores.

The system is often mischaracterized in Western media as a unified Orwellian scoring machine. The

reality is more insidious: it is a decentralized, expanding infrastructure of behavioral conditioning, whose logic — rate, rank, restrict — is already being replicated by private platforms in democratic societies in softer forms. Credit scores, insurance algorithms, predictive policing models, and social media reputation systems are all variants of the same architecture. China has simply made the political function explicit.

The question is not whether China's system will expand. It is whether democratic societies will recognize the same architecture when it appears wearing the language of efficiency, safety, and personalization.

80.7B

records collected by the national credit platform

200K+

new blacklistings in 2025 alone

23

new governance measures issued in March 2025 alone

Sources: ChoZan, November 2025; Wikipedia — Social Credit System, February 2026; China Briefing, May 2025; IFRI

■ CASE FILE V — NEW

Fortress Europe: The Silent Surrender

European Union / Frontex, 2022 – present

The European Union presents itself as the global benchmark for ethical AI governance: the AI Act, approved in 2024, is the world's first binding legislative framework for artificial intelligence. Yet at its own borders, Europe is building the infrastructure it formally prohibits for its citizens.

Frontex, the EU border agency, has leased Israeli-manufactured Heron surveillance drones — the same model deployed in the skies over Gaza — for Mediterranean patrols. In 2025 the lease was renewed for four more years. In August 2025, Frontex conducted a 60-day pilot in Bulgaria using

Shield AI's autonomous V-BAT drones, valued at approximately $5 billion by their manufacturer, to monitor refugees crossing from Turkey. A closed-door meeting in Warsaw in September 2025 presented the Bulgaria trial as an "Innovation" success, with no public debate and no parliamentary vote.

The EU's ETIAS system — the Travel Information and Authorisation System — employs a screening algorithm that cross-checks personal data against security databases to assign predictive risk scores to all visa-exempt travellers before they board a flight. Legal scholars have warned that the system is shifting from transparent rule-based governance toward semi-automated profiling that normalizes pre-emptive suspicion before any offence has occurred. Eurodac, originally an asylum fingerprint database, has under Regulation 2024/1358 expanded to collect biometric data from six migrant categories and track individuals across EU member states.

Accountability is systematically diffuse: Frontex directs operations, eu-LISA manages the databases, national authorities handle the data, and private vendors supply the systems — under procurement frameworks that Statewatch and Privacy International describe as structurally opaque. When errors or rights violations occur, there is no clear body responsible. The EU's AI Act explicitly excludes "border security" from its strictest oversight requirements.

The AI Act prohibits mass biometric surveillance of European citizens. It does not prohibit the same surveillance of non-European refugees. This is not an oversight. It is a political choice.

4 yrs

Frontex's renewed contract for Gaza-tested Heron drones

60 days

Bulgaria autonomous drone pilot, no public debate

0

parliamentary votes on AI border surveillance contracts

Sources: Inkstick / Solomon / SWI Swiss Info joint investigation, December 2025; Oxford Law Blogs — Border Criminologies, December 2025 and July 2025; Frontex Industry Day, February 2025; Amnesty International, 2024

■ CASE FILE VI — NEW

COMPAS: When the Algorithm Goes to Court

United States, 2013 – present

The COMPAS system — Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions — is a proprietary algorithm sold by the private company Northpointe to courts in 46 U.S. states. Judges use it to determine bail, probation conditions, and sentence length. It assesses the statistical likelihood that a defendant will reoffend. Its source code is a trade secret. No defendant can inspect,

challenge, or understand the logic by which their future is calculated.

Two faces of the same algorithm

In the spring of 2014, eighteen-year-old Brisha Borden was running late to pick up her godsibling from school when she spotted a child's blue Huffy bicycle and silver Razor scooter sitting unlocked outside an apartment block in Coral Springs, Florida. She and a friend picked them up and rode them a short distance down the street. The owner appeared and said they belonged to her six-year-old son. The girls dropped the vehicles and walked away. A neighbour had already called the police. Borden and her friend were arrested, charged with burglary and petty theft of items valued at $80. COMPAS assigned Borden a risk score of 8 out of 10 — high risk. The bail recommendation was raised from $0 to $1,000. Borden spent two nights in jail.

Brisha Borden, 18 — Black. No prior adult record. Risk score: 8/10. Never reoffended.

The summer before, forty-one-year-old Vernon Prater was arrested for shoplifting $86.35 worth of tools from a Home Depot in North Lauderdale. Prater had served five years in prison for armed robbery and had additional robbery arrests on his record. COMPAS assigned him a risk score of 3 out of 10 — low risk.

Vernon Prater, 41 — White. Prior armed robbery conviction, five years served. Risk score: 3/10. Later convicted of grand theft; currently in Florida state prison.

The algorithm was precisely inverted. The girl who never reoffended was deemed high risk. The man with a violent record who went on to commit further crimes was deemed low risk. When ProPublica analyzed COMPAS data from over 10,000 defendants in Broward County, Florida, the pattern was systemic: Black defendants were almost twice as likely as white defendants to be incorrectly labeled high risk for future crime. White defendants were more likely to be incorrectly labeled low risk

and go on to reoffend. The company disputed the findings. The algorithm remains in use in 46 states.

In Wisconsin, Eric Loomis was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison for driving a stolen vehicle and fleeing police. The judge cited his COMPAS score directly: “I note that you’ve been identified, through the COMPAS assessment, as an individual who is at high risk to the community.” Loomis challenged the use of an opaque, proprietary algorithm in his sentencing as a violation of due process. The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled against him. The court acknowledged the algorithm’s disputed fairness — and then dismissed the concern.

No defendant in the United States has the legal right to know why an algorithm decided their future. The company’s trade secret supersedes the individual’s right to understand their own sentence.

46

U.S. states currently using algorithmic risk scores in courts

2×

Black defendants more likely to be falsely labeled “high risk”

0

defendants with legal right to inspect the algorithm

Sources: ProPublica, “Machine Bias,” May 2016; ProPublica, “What Algorithmic Injustice Looks Like in Real Life,” 2016; State v. Loomis, Wisconsin Supreme Court, 2016; UCLA Law Review, 2019; Research Outreach, 2023

■ CASE FILE VII — NEW

The Resisters: Those Who Said No — And What Happened to Them

Silicon Valley / Global, 2018 – present

Every war has its resisters. This one is no different. What is different is what happens to them.

Google / Project Maven, 2018

In the spring of 2018, Google employees discovered that the company had quietly contracted with the U.S. Department of Defense to provide AI technology for Project Maven — a Pentagon program to automate the analysis of drone footage for targeting. More than 4,000 Google engineers signed an internal petition addressed to CEO Sundar Pichai. “Google should not be in the business of war,” the letter began. Approximately a dozen engineers resigned.

One of those who resigned told Gizmodo: “At some point, I realized I could not in good faith recommend anyone join Google, knowing what I knew. I realized if I can’t recommend people join here, then why am I still here?” Google did not renew the Maven contract. Within three years, it had resumed cooperation with the Pentagon under new AI principles that permitted work on “non-offensive” defense applications. Project Maven was trans-

ferred to Palantir. The engineers who stayed and signed the petition were not promoted.

What changed

Between 2018 and 2026, the internal landscape of the tech industry shifted. The engineers who resigned from Google over Project Maven were celebrated in the press as ethical dissenters. Their successors have been methodically removed. Between 2023 and 2025, Google, Meta, and Amazon restructured their AI ethics and safety teams, eliminating or marginalizing roles created specifically to flag societal risks. At OpenAI, a series of departures — including board members, safety researchers, and senior leadership — followed internal disputes over the pace of capability development versus safety research. Each departure was followed by a company statement reassuring the public of its commitment to responsible AI.

The pattern is consistent: those who raise questions about the trajectory of AI systems are moved, marginalised, bought out, or reorganised away. This is not conspiracy. It is market logic. The

financial incentives flowing toward speed, scale, and military application are now vastly larger than those flowing toward restraint. The dissenters are not wrong. They are simply outvoted by money.

In 2018, 4,000 Google engineers signed a petition against a Pentagon contract and won. In 2025, the company's AI is embedded in military systems across multiple continents. The resisters did not lose because they were wrong. They lost because the architecture they were resisting was faster than the ethics designed to slow it down.

4,000

Google employees who signed the 2018 Maven petition

~12

engineers who actually resigned

0

binding corporate policies that emerged from their protest

Sources: Gizmodo, May 2018; The Verge, May 2018; Arms Control Association, July 2018; Roll Call, November 2019; Common Dreams, May 2018

———

The pages that follow are an attempt to understand how we arrived here, and what kind of order might still be built that does not require the elimination of human judgment as the price of efficiency. But the reader should carry this dispatch forward. The diagnosis is not speculative. The stakes are not abstract. The war — for sovereignty, for accountability, for the right of human beings to remain the subjects rather than the objects of consequential decisions — is already underway.

— Giammario Battaglia

PREFACE

This book was not conceived as a commentary on current affairs, though it speaks directly to the confusions of the present. Nor was it conceived as a technical manual, though it advances institutional proposals and operational mechanisms. It emerges, rather, from a longer dissatisfaction with the categories through which contemporary societies have grown accustomed to describing themselves. Too much of the language available to us has become either managerial or reactive: managerial when it seeks to domesticate profound civilizational tensions through procedural vocabulary, reactive when it responds to real fractures with forms of indignation that name the wound without rebuilding the order capable of bearing it.

What follows is an attempt to move beyond that exhausted alternative. The book begins from a simple but severe intuition: that the crisis of our time cannot be fully understood as a crisis of efficiency, representation, or inequality alone. Something more fundamental has weakened. Economic systems continue to generate wealth, technological systems continue to extend capability, and institutions continue to regulate, classify, and manage. Yet beneath this operational sophistication, trust erodes, cohesion thins, authority loses credibility, and the future itself begins to fragment into increasingly unequal horizons. The result is not merely dissatisfaction. It is a loss of recognizability. The world continues to move, but fewer and fewer people can still see themselves in the terms through which it is being transformed.

It is this fracture that the book names as a crisis of meaning. The expression should not be misunderstood. Meaning here does not refer to a private psychological need, nor to a decorative moral supplement applied to an otherwise

self-sufficient economic order. It refers to the civil condition under which a society can still understand why power is exercised, who bears the burden of change, what forms of return remain visible, and whether freedom is still something more than the selective insulation of the strongest actors from the dependencies of common life. Once that condition weakens, systems do not cease to function. They cease to justify themselves convincingly.

The wager of this work is that the crisis cannot be repaired either by nostalgic retreat or by more efficient versions of the same administrative grammar that produced it. Nor can it be resolved by surrendering the future to the strategic and technological exceptionalism that increasingly presents itself as the only serious answer to institutional fatigue. The path proposed here is more demanding. It asks whether capitalism can be reconstructed not by denying innovation, ambition, or power, but by forcing them back into a visible relation with truth, reciprocity, and civic return.

For that reason, the book moves across several terrains that are too often kept apart. It begins with distrust and resentment, not as moods, but as structural signals of damaged legitimacy. It passes through the crises of authority, sovereignty, and decision in the algorithmic age. It returns to the civil economy tradition in search of a lost grammar of public happiness. It develops the idea of the Systemic Social Dividend as a way of reconnecting common-conditioned value to the social body. It then turns toward the frontier of biopolitics, where long life, healthy duration, and access to biological time begin to challenge inherited notions of citizenship and equality. Finally, it confronts the technoright not as a caricature, but as one of the most forceful and incomplete responses to the exhaustion of late liberal modernity.

The reader will therefore find neither a purely philosophical treatise nor a conventional policy book. The argument is intentionally hybrid. It seeks to hold together diagnosis and propo-

sal, genealogy and design, political theory and institutional mechanics. This hybridity is not accidental. It reflects the conviction that the present crisis is itself hybrid: economic and symbolic, technological and political, territorial and temporal, juridical and anthropological all at once. No single disciplinary language is enough.

What the book ultimately proposes is not a softer capitalism, nor an anti-capitalist negation, nor a technological utopia administered by a more capable elite. It proposes a different criterion of rationality. A system should no longer be called rational if, in the pursuit of efficiency and growth, it steadily consumes the trust, temporal equality, and social recognizability without which no common future can remain politically inhabitable. The true question is not whether advanced societies can become more powerful. They clearly can. The question is whether they can become more powerful without becoming progressively less common.

This, then, is the horizon within which the pages that follow should be read. They do not offer a final doctrine. They offer a framework, an argument, and a challenge: to think again the relation between innovation and legitimacy, between strategic capability and public happiness, between the power to transform the world and the duty to leave that world recognizable to those who must live in it.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is written in the belief that the most dangerous crises are often those that continue to be administered successfully long after they have ceased to be understood. We live in such a time. The institutions of advanced societies still operate, but more and more often they do so in ways that deepen estrangement even while preserving order on the surface. Decisions are made, systems function, metrics improve, and yet the civic fabric weakens. What disappears first is not power, but intelligibility.

The pages that follow were born from the need to name that disappearance more precisely and to resist the false alternatives that now dominate so much public life. On one side

stands a tired managerialism that still believes the future can be stabilized through regulation, disclosure, and procedural refinement alone. On the other stands a growing fascination with forms of technological sovereignty, exceptional agency, and selective exit that grasp the crisis more sharply but too often answer it with asymmetry rather than common reconstruction. I have found neither position sufficient.

The argument advanced here is therefore both critical and constructive. Critical, because it tries to show why distrust, resentment, algorithmic opacity, territorial abandonment, and temporal inequality are not separate malfunctions but connected symptoms of a deeper disorder. Constructive, because it tries to develop a framework through which capitalism itself may be judged and reorganized according to whether it preserves or consumes the civil conditions of its own legitimacy.

The expression **Capitalism of Meaning** is meant in that exact sense. It does not indicate moral idealism, corporate benevolence, or a

more attractive narrative for the same structures. It indicates an order in which the gains of transformation can no longer remain detached from visible forms of return, where innovation must remain answerable to the social body that makes it possible, and where the future is not allowed to fragment into insulated privileges for a few and managed precarity for the many.

If the book has an ambition, it is not to offer closure. It is to reopen questions that contemporary discourse too often treats as settled: what counts as rationality in a technologically accelerated society; what kind of freedom deserves political defense; what institutions are needed when time itself becomes unequally governable; and how a common world might still be rebuilt without denying conflict, complexity, or ambition.

The tone of the argument is intentionally exacting because the stakes are no longer modest. Artificial intelligence, biotechnological acceleration, ecological transition, geopolitical rivalry, and the restructuring of work are already

transforming the horizon within which democratic societies must justify themselves. In such a period, conceptual vagueness quickly becomes political weakness. I have therefore tried to avoid both euphemism and rhetorical inflation, and instead to work toward a vocabulary proportionate to the severity of the moment.

This book is offered in that spirit: not as a final answer, but as a contribution to the work of rebuilding a civic grammar equal to the transformations now underway. If it succeeds at all, it will do so by making one thing clearer: that no society can endure for long if it accelerates the world while ceasing to make that world recognizable to those who inhabit it.

INTRODUCTION

THE APOCALYPTIC CROSSROADS

There are historical moments in which the available language ceases to be adequate to the reality it is meant to describe. The old words continue to circulate, institutions continue to invoke them, public discourse continues to repeat them, yet something in the world has already moved elsewhere. We still speak of growth, innovation, competitiveness, efficiency, regulation, inclusion, resilience, even sustainability, as though these terms retained the same semantic and civilizational force they possessed only a few decades ago. But they no longer do. They survive, often, as managerial residues of a world whose center of gravity has shifted. What is taking place before our eyes is not simply

another cyclical disruption of capitalism, nor a temporary imbalance between technological acceleration and legal adaptation, nor even the familiar lag between economic transformation and political response. The fracture is deeper. It concerns the very relationship between power and purpose, between decision and legitimacy, between production and the conditions that make social life bearable.

The crisis of our time does not consist primarily in the malfunctioning of systems. On the contrary, one of the most disquieting features of the present is that systems continue to function with astonishing procedural sophistication even when they no longer know for whom they are functioning, toward what horizon they are moving, or at what human cost they are operating. Markets optimize, platforms scale, financial instruments circulate, algorithms classify, institutions monitor, legal systems formalize, and organizations comply. Yet all this efficiency increasingly coexists with an opposite social experience: distrust, fragmentation, resentment,

opacity, symbolic disorientation, and the growing perception that decisions of enormous consequence are being made everywhere without ever truly appearing as decisions. What emerges, then, is not merely a crisis of governance, but a crisis of intelligibility. The world is being managed, but it is becoming less and less inhabitable in moral, political, and civic terms.

This book begins from that contradiction. It argues that advanced modernity is not only overwhelmed by complexity, but by an excess of power without orientation. Technology has amplified the human capacity to intervene in reality to an unprecedented degree. Finance has multiplied the speed, abstraction, and reach of transformation. Artificial intelligence is extending the domain of calculation into fields once thought inseparable from judgment, prudence, and responsibility. Biotechnology is beginning to redraw the boundaries of health, frailty, aging, and perhaps, in time, even the duration of life itself. And yet precisely at the moment when our technical power becomes more pene-

trating than ever, our collective capacity to assign intelligible, legitimate, and shareable form to what we decide is weakening. The more we can do, the less clear it becomes why we are doing it, who bears the consequences, who decides, and under which conception of the human good these decisions can still be defended.

This is why the present moment cannot be reduced to a crisis of institutions in the narrow sense, nor to a crisis of capitalism in the classical sense. It is, more radically, a crisis of meaning within capitalism itself. Not meaning in a sentimental, decorative, or vaguely spiritual sense, but meaning as the condition through which a society can still recognize itself within its own transformations. Meaning is what allows power to become intelligible, conflict to remain politically traversable, sacrifice to be acknowledged rather than concealed, and freedom to remain a common horizon instead of hardening into asymmetric privilege. Where meaning erodes, trust retreats. Where trust retreats, cohesion weakens. Where cohesion weakens,

even formally free societies begin to lose the common ground necessary to sustain legitimate transformation.

It is from this awareness that the concept of a **Capitalism of Meaning** emerges. The phrase may initially sound rhetorical, perhaps even ambiguous, but it is meant here in a precise and demanding sense. It does not refer to an ethically varnished capitalism, softened by philanthropy, sustainability branding, or improved corporate storytelling. Nor does it refer to an idealized "humane market" corrected by moral sentiment while leaving its underlying architecture intact. More radically, the Capitalism of Meaning names the attempt to think an economic and institutional order that does not limit itself to producing value while treating its human, symbolic, and political consequences as externalities. It names an order that can no longer consider itself rational if, in producing wealth, it erodes the trust that sustains it, the cohesion that makes social life inhabitable, and the minimum equity without which liberty cea-

ses to be a shared promise and becomes a privilege defended by those already inside.

In this perspective, the central question is no longer whether capitalism should become more moral, but whether it can become more truthful. Can an economic system remain viable if it systematically displaces the social costs of its own transformations? Can a political order remain legitimate if the most consequential decisions are increasingly presented not as contestable choices but as inevitable outputs of technical necessity? Can innovation still claim civilizational dignity if its gains are privatized while its dislocations are naturalized? These are not secondary questions. They go to the heart of whether a society can endure the acceleration of history without dissolving the bonds that hold it together.

The answer offered by this book begins with a refusal of two opposite illusions. The first is the illusion that the existing order can be corrected through better metrics, improved disclosure, more refined taxonomies, or a more sophistica-

ted language of sustainability. Such instruments may matter, but they do not in themselves resolve the deeper fracture. They often remain external correctives applied to a system whose underlying logic still treats trust, cohesion, legitimacy, and symbolic repair as residual matters. The second illusion is the belief that the exhaustion of democratic institutions authorizes an escape into technolibertarian sovereignty: the fantasy that the failures of the State, the university, and the mediating institutions of modern politics can be overcome by transferring agency to private technological elites, proprietary infrastructures, selective enclaves, or forms of depoliticized optimization. This second path, increasingly visible in the rhetoric of the techno-right, recognizes the crisis more lucidly than many defenders of the status quo. But it responds to the collapse of public meaning with a selective solution for the few rather than an institutional horizon for the many.

The figure of the sovereign individual, owner of himself, of his data, of his time horizon, of

his biological opportunities, and of his exit options, has become one of the most seductive myths of our age. Yet this myth is born from a vacuum. It gains strength where institutions no longer offer horizon, where decision-making loses public intelligibility, where the State appears slow and extractive, where politics becomes performative rather than formative, and where the social contract no longer feels like a promise but like an administrative residue. The technoright, in this sense, is not a mere ideological eccentricity. It is a coherent reaction to a real decomposition. It has grasped, with unsettling clarity, the fatigue of a historical form of the West. But its remedy is selective, oligarchic, and ultimately anti-political: more exception than polis, more island than city, more private sovereignty than reconstruction of the common bond.

Against both the cosmetic reformism of exhausted managerial liberalism and the oligarchic accelerationism of technolibertarian withdrawal, this book advances a different claim:

that the central issue of the twenty-first century is the quality, visibility, and legitimacy of decision itself. The deepest transformations of contemporary power do not occur only in markets, technologies, or laws taken separately. They occur in the way decisions are displaced, fragmented, shielded, and depoliticized. Decisions increasingly appear as technical derivations, as outputs of models, as compliance effects, as benchmarked necessities, as algorithmic classifications, as systemic imperatives. In this apparent neutrality, one of the deepest metamorphoses of power is consummated: the decision-maker withdraws behind the procedure, behind the machine, behind the objectivity of the formula, while the consequences continue to affect lives, territories, work, health, expectations of justice, and the very possibility of civic belonging.

This is why a Capitalism of Meaning is inseparable from a critique of the opacification of decision-making. There can be no genuine social sustainability where the place of decision

withdraws from public understanding, where conflict is anesthetized rather than traversed, where exclusions generated by complex choices are treated as inevitable collateral effects rather than systemic costs to be recognized, governed, and, where necessary, compensated. A mature order is not one that eliminates conflict altogether; that has never been possible. It is one that develops higher forms of truthfulness, accountability, and recomposition. The task is not to make history bloodless. The task is to prevent its costs from remaining invisible while they generate irreversible fractures in the civic fabric.

This shift in perspective has profound implications. It means that social sustainability cannot be treated as a decorative branch of economics or an ethical supplement appended to governance. It must be understood as a hidden infrastructure of system viability. It means that responsibility can no longer be conceived only as an individual virtue or a legal attribution after the fact. It must be treated as a scarce institu-

tional good that needs to be preserved before the moment of closure, while decision is still decision and has not yet collapsed into execution. It means that economic order must be judged not only by how efficiently it allocates resources, but by how truthfully it accounts for the social, symbolic, and territorial costs of transformation.

For this reason, the argument of this book crosses boundaries that are usually kept apart. It moves deliberately along a threshold where capitalism encounters the crisis of representation, algorithmic governance encounters political philosophy, finance encounters territorial resilience, biotechnology encounters citizenship, and longevity ceases to be a specialist issue and becomes a new test of substantive equality. One of the most destabilizing intuitions of our century is that the next great inequality may concern not only income, work, or education, but differential access to the extension of life, to the quality of biological time, and to the capacity to postpone illness, decline, and premature death.

Should this horizon consolidate without a new architecture of justice, the issue would no longer be merely medical or technological. It would mark the collapse of one of the final universalistic claims of modern democracy.

This is also why the book does not stop at diagnosis. It seeks to identify mechanisms, institutional devices, and economic forms adequate to the depth of the fracture. Among these, the concept of the **Systemic Social Dividend** occupies a central place. It is not conceived as a redistributive appendix, a residual compensatory tool, or a passive transfer. Rather, it is one of the structural pillars of a reconfigured capitalism. If large-scale economic, technological, and industrial transformations generate diffuse social costs that are currently expelled from the immediate balance sheet, then an ordered society must build instruments capable of re-internalizing those costs, rendering them visible, and returning them to the community as stabilization, territorial regeneration, infrastructures of trust, and the capacity to pass through transitions wi-

thout shattering the civic pact. In this light, the dividend is neither alms nor rent. It is the institutional form through which a system acknowledges that value is never produced in a vacuum, but upon a social foundation that must be preserved, repaired, and made inhabitable again.

The path followed in the pages that come does not proceed by sealed compartments but by concentric circles. It begins with the crisis of trust, not as a mood but as a structural signal. It then moves to the crisis of decision, where the central drama of our age becomes visible: the disappearance of accountable agency behind procedural and algorithmic mediation. From there it advances toward the need for new forms of thirdness, mediation, and institutional threshold spaces capable of protecting the human intelligibility of consequential choices. It then turns toward the economic architecture required to ensure that innovation does not translate into sacrifice without return. And finally it opens the new frontier in which labor, techno-

logy, longevity, citizenship, and legitimation reveal themselves as dimensions of a single civilizational question.

No serious book can promise easy solutions, and this one does not. No institutional architecture will ever eliminate asymmetry, loss, conflict, or the tragic dimension of decision. But that is precisely why the argument developed here insists on a harder demand: the task of a mature society is not to pretend that great transformations are costless, but to prevent those costs from being concealed, offloaded, naturalized, and converted into destiny for some and silent advantage for others. Where contemporary capitalism increasingly demands adaptation without recognition, flexibility without protection, and innovation without repair, the Capitalism of Meaning seeks to reopen a more exacting possibility: that of an economic order capable of telling the truth about its own effects and of building, around that truth, new forms of reconciliation.

If there is an ambition in these pages, it is not to correct capitalism from the outside, but to interrogate its destiny from within. The question that must now be faced is simple, though severe: can a system still call itself rational if it accelerates the world while consuming the trust that sustains it, emptying the cohesion that makes it inhabitable, privatizing hope, rendering decision opaque, and distributing ever more unequally even access to the time of life? The Capitalism of Meaning begins at this point of no return. It begins by answering that growth, innovation, optimization, and prediction are no longer enough. A civilization must also deserve the future.

CHAPTER 1

THE GLOBAL MAP OF RESENTMENT

Resentment is often described as though it were a moral defect of publics, an emotional excess of societies unable to adapt, or the psychological by-product of a communication environment saturated with noise, speed, and outrage. Such descriptions are not entirely false, but they remain radically insufficient. They mistake a symptom for a disposition and an atmosphere for a cause. The crisis of resentment that marks so many contemporary democracies is not simply the result of bad tempers, cultural regression, or social media amplification. It is the more profound expression of a structural fracture between the distribution of transformation and the distribution of recognition. In other

words, societies are not merely becoming angrier; they are increasingly unable to experience the order governing them as intelligible, fair, and in some minimal sense answerable.

This distinction is decisive. A society can endure hardship, inequality, and even conflict for long periods when its members still perceive that burdens are shared according to recognizable criteria, that sacrifice is named as sacrifice, and that power remains, at least in principle, visible and contestable. What becomes politically corrosive is not deprivation alone, but opacity joined to asymmetry. People can live with difficulty more easily than with the feeling that decisions affecting their lives have been taken elsewhere, by no one in particular, in a language they do not control, according to standards they are never asked to judge, and with consequences that they must simply absorb as fate. Where this experience becomes widespread, resentment ceases to be episodic. It becomes infrastructural.

The central claim of this chapter is therefore that contemporary resentment is not an accidental pathology of democratic life. It is a systemic signal. It indicates that the social order has begun to consume the very conditions of trust and legitimacy on which its own stability depends. The figures vary across countries, institutions, and sectors, but the pattern is strikingly consistent: trust in political institutions weakens, trust in intermediary bodies fragments, trust in media polarizes, trust in expertise becomes conditional, and trust in markets survives only in increasingly abstract and instrumental form. At the same time, perceptions of injustice become more volatile, more personalized, and more difficult to process within traditional ideological frameworks. Citizens may disagree on causes, but they converge on a shared sensation: that the game is no longer readable, that rules no longer generate reciprocity, and that sacrifice is no longer accompanied by any credible horizon of reintegration.

To understand the depth of this condition, it is useful to move beyond the language of generic dissatisfaction and consider resentment as a political indicator of broken mediation. Between the individual and the system there once existed a dense field of institutions, narratives, rituals, and expectations capable of translating structural change into forms that could still be interpreted, negotiated, or resisted. Parties, unions, churches, universities, professions, local communities, public broadcasters, and civic associations all participated, in different ways, in this work of mediation. They did not eliminate conflict. But they transformed it into a space of meaning. They made it possible, however imperfectly, for individuals to see themselves not merely as the passive recipients of systemic shocks but as participants in a shared world of justification, contestation, and belonging.

Much of that mediating space has thinned. Some of it has decayed because it became bureaucratic, extractive, self-referential, or ideologically exhausted. Some of it has been disinter-

mediated by digital infrastructures that flatten authority, accelerate comparison, and reward performative antagonism. Some of it has simply been outpaced by the speed and abstraction of contemporary transformations. Whatever the combination of causes, the result is similar: systemic decisions descend more quickly, with greater opacity, and through weaker channels of interpretation than before. Resentment grows precisely in this gap between impact and intelligibility.

This is why the data on trust, social fragmentation, and civic fatigue must be read carefully. They are not merely sociological curiosities or reputational metrics. They are early-warning indicators of a deeper process in which the normative binding force of institutions begins to weaken. When citizens say they do not trust governments, corporations, media, or even in some cases science, this does not necessarily mean that they reject governance, enterprise, information, or knowledge as such. More often, it means that they no longer experience the in-

stitutional forms through which these functions are exercised as sufficiently transparent, reciprocal, or accountable to merit durable confidence. Distrust, in such contexts, is not always irrational. It can be a dark form of realism.

Yet realism alone cannot explain the shape resentment takes. Its intensity derives not only from material disappointment but from symbolic humiliation. This is one of the most underappreciated elements of our time. People do not revolt only because they have less. They revolt because what they lose is often accompanied by the implicit demand to interpret that loss as progress, necessity, or adaptation. Entire regions can be deindustrialized in the name of efficiency; labor can be fragmented in the name of flexibility; social protections can be weakened in the name of competitiveness; public goods can be hollowed out in the name of fiscal discipline; decisions can be automated in the name of neutrality. In each case, those who bear the costs are often asked not merely to endure them but to accept the language in which those costs

are justified. Resentment erupts where this symbolic demand becomes intolerable.

It is here that the language of grievance used in many policy and media discussions becomes inadequate. Grievance is often framed as a subjective state, something proximate to complaint. But what if grievance is not merely a sentiment, but the political residue of structural non-recognition? What if it names the zone in which individuals and communities register that their losses have been counted economically but not acknowledged civically? In that sense, grievance is not the opposite of rationality. It may be what remains of rational perception once institutional language has ceased to carry the truth of social experience.

This helps explain why resentment does not map neatly onto traditional class categories, nor remain confined to the poorest or most precarious segments of society. It can affect the downwardly mobile middle classes, peripheral territories, culturally dislocated elites, insecure professionals, younger cohorts trapped between

formal credentials and fragile prospects, and even highly productive sectors that no longer believe the broader system recognizes the value they generate. The common denominator is not a single economic position but a shared experience of systemic dislocation without an adequate grammar of reintegration. What joins these heterogeneous groups is not a unified ideology but a thinning faith that the order surrounding them can still justify itself.

In this respect, contemporary resentment is inseparable from the crisis of representation. But representation here must be understood in a wider sense than electoral politics. The crisis concerns the ability of institutions to represent reality back to those who inhabit it. A representative order is not only one in which officials are elected. It is one in which social experience can be translated into categories that make contestation meaningful and reciprocity imaginable. When institutions lose this capacity, citizens do not simply become cynical. They become epistemically estranged. They cease to believe that

the official language of policy, innovation, sustainability, efficiency, or reform is speaking about the same world in which they live.

This estrangement generates a fertile environment for substitution. If trusted mediators decline, other interpreters rush in. Digital influencers, partisan entrepreneurs, conspiratorial narratives, charismatic outsiders, and algorithmically amplified micro-publics all offer immediate explanatory frameworks, however distorted. What they often provide is not truth in any strong sense, but emotional legibility. They name enemies, assign intention, restore dramatic contours, and replace abstraction with agency. In doing so, they often reactivate one of the oldest mechanisms in political life: the search for a visible bearer of invisible disorder. Resentment thus becomes highly vulnerable to scapegoating, because a society deprived of intelligible mediation will seek concrete figures on which to project diffuse but real experiences of dispossession.

It would be a mistake, however, to treat scapegoating as the essence of resentment rather than as one of its possible degradations. Before resentment becomes persecutory, it is often diagnostic. It perceives something real: that a system can continue to function while ceasing to appear answerable; that efficiency can coexist with humiliation; that legality can coexist with destructiveness; that innovation can deepen exclusion if it is severed from recognition and repair. The error lies not in perceiving fracture, but in assigning it to false targets or translating it into mythical simplifications. The pathologies of resentment should not prevent us from seeing the truth it often carries in raw, unprocessed form.

This is why the question of trust must be handled with theoretical precision. Trust is not reducible to optimism, satisfaction, or emotional comfort. Nor is it simply a matter of institutional reputation. Trust is a structural condition that allows individuals and groups to accept exposure to uncertainty because they believe the

order governing that uncertainty remains in some basic sense legible, reciprocal, and bounded by norms. A low-trust society is not merely one in which people feel negatively. It is one in which the future becomes harder to inhabit because the relation between risk, sacrifice, and justification has broken down. Under such conditions, every transformation is interpreted under the sign of extraction, every reform under the sign of hidden beneficiaries, every promise under the sign of probable betrayal.

Once trust is understood in this way, the contemporary landscape becomes clearer. The problem is not simply that institutions communicate poorly, nor that publics have become too emotional, nor that digital culture has undermined shared truth. All of this matters, but none of it reaches the core. The deeper issue is that many societies are living through transformations whose benefits are mediated upward while their costs are mediated downward. Gains appear in aggregate indicators, stock valuations, productivity metrics, and macroeconomic nar-

ratives; costs appear in territories, biographies, health outcomes, family instability, civic withdrawal, and diffuse symbolic injury. Where there is no credible institutional mechanism for translating this asymmetry into visible recognition and political repair, resentment becomes the social language of unprocessed imbalance.

This is also why resentment must be seen as linked not only to inequality, but to temporality. Many citizens no longer experience time itself as a shared horizon. The future appears distributed unequally. Some inhabit accelerating futures saturated with optionality, mobility, financial leverage, and technological enhancement. Others inhabit suspended presents marked by waiting, exposure, adaptation, and recurring vulnerability. When people no longer feel that they are moving through history together, solidarity weakens even before material deprivation becomes extreme. Social cohesion depends not only on shared institutions but on some minimum synchrony of expectation. A society

fractures when it ceases to promise a common future that can be imagined across differences.

In this light, resentment is a map of temporal as well as social disintegration. It reveals a world in which different groups live under radically different assumptions about what can be hoped for, what can be repaired, what can be survived, and who will bear the burden of adjustment. This helps explain why debates about innovation, ecological transition, automation, migration, and public finance so often generate not merely disagreement but deep moral hostility. These are not only disputes over policy. They are struggles over whose time counts, whose losses matter, and whose horizon will define the terms of adaptation.

The concept of social sustainability becomes indispensable at precisely this point. If trust, cohesion, and equity are treated not as ornamental values but as structural conditions of system viability, then resentment can be interpreted as one of the clearest symptoms that those conditions are deteriorating. A society in which

resentment becomes chronic is not merely a society in a bad mood. It is a society whose institutions are losing the capacity to metabolize transformation without corroding legitimacy. This is why resentment must be understood as a warning before it becomes a rupture. It announces that the system is consuming the social basis on which its own long-term functionality depends.

To say this is not to romanticize publics or deny the manipulations, simplifications, and destructiveness that resentment can generate. It is to restore proportion. The essential task is not to moralize resentment from above, nor to flatter it from below, but to decipher what kind of order produces it with such consistency across otherwise different contexts. The answer proposed here is that resentment arises where decisions of great consequence are no longer publicly traversable, where the language of justification has been captured by technocratic abstraction, and where the costs of transformation fall

upon subjects and territories that lack credible means of symbolic and material reintegration.

At this stage, the relevance of the chapter's title becomes clearer. The global map of resentment is not a cartography of anger in the abstract. It is a map of broken reciprocity. It marks the places, classes, generations, and institutions in which the relation between contribution and recognition, exposure and protection, sacrifice and justification has begun to fail. Its geographies are multiple: post-industrial regions, peripheral communities, precarious urban belts, overstretched middle classes, exhausted welfare states, polarized media ecosystems, digitally fragmented publics. But beneath these differences lies a common signal: the intuition that the prevailing order no longer knows how to convert transformation into legitimacy.

The consequences of this failure are far-reaching. A society that cannot convert transformation into legitimacy will increasingly oscillate between managerial denial and explosive reaction. On one side, elites continue to speak

the language of inevitability, metrics, and abstract gains. On the other, publics seek ever more immediate, dramatic, and personalized forms of redress. Between the two, the mediating institutions that once translated structural change into political process continue to weaken. This is the space in which both technocratic exhaustion and neo-tribal intensification grow. The one offers management without meaning; the other offers meaning without truth. Neither can sustain a durable civic order.

The argument of this book begins here because no reconstruction of capitalism is possible unless this map is taken seriously. The Capitalism of Meaning is not first of all an answer to inefficiency. It is an answer to a legitimacy deficit produced by systems that continue to generate transformation while losing the grammar through which that transformation can be made socially bearable. If resentment is read merely as noise, the response will be paternalism or repression. If it is read merely as authenticity, the response will be populist escalation.

But if it is read as a structural signal of broken mediation, then a different path opens: one centered on restoring intelligibility, accountability, institutional truthfulness, and mechanisms of reintegration capable of making transformation once again compatible with civic belonging.

The next step, therefore, is to examine more closely one of the most revealing intellectual responses to this landscape of breakdown: the technolibertarian diagnosis represented, in exemplary form, by Peter Thiel. For if resentment maps the social surface of decomposition, the technolibertarian imagination articulates one of its most lucid and troubling elite interpretations.

CHAPTER 2

THE PARADOX OF THIEL: LIBERTARIANISM AS SYMPTOM

Every age of decomposition produces not only victims, but interpreters. Some register the fractures of their time from below, through grievance, exhaustion, and diffuse resentment. Others register them from above, through diagnosis, strategy, and theoretical provocation. Peter Thiel belongs unmistakably to the second category. He is not important merely because of his wealth, his influence in technology, or his place within the mythology of the PayPal generation. He matters because he has articulated, with unusual frankness and coherence, one of the most revealing elite responses to the exhau-

stion of liberal modernity. To read Thiel seriously is not to agree with him. It is to recognize that he has understood something decisive about the contemporary West: that a civilization can continue to expand in technical sophistication while losing confidence in its own institutions, its own political forms, and even its own capacity to justify common life.

The paradox lies here. Thiel often sees the crisis more sharply than many of its official managers, but the remedy he tends to favor is not the reconstruction of public meaning but a selective strategy of exit, exception, and intensified private agency. He perceives institutional stagnation, cultural exhaustion, bureaucratic sclerosis, educational hollowing, and political timidity. Yet instead of treating these as reasons to rebuild the shared architectures of decision, he is repeatedly drawn toward forms of sovereignty that detach themselves from the common world: the entrepreneur over the citizen, the enclave over the institution, the frontier over the polity, the exceptional mind over the democra-

tic process, the private project over the repair of mediation. This is why Thiel is so important for the argument of this book. He is not merely an adversary. He is a symptom. Through him, a wider civilizational temptation becomes legible.

In order to understand this temptation, one must begin with the character of Thiel's dissatisfaction. Unlike the complacent defenders of managerial liberalism, he does not believe that the main problem of the contemporary order is insufficient optimization, insufficient diversity language, insufficient procedural refinement, or insufficient entrepreneurial dynamism within existing political forms. He sees something deeper: the loss of teleology. He sees a civilization that has become procedural without purpose, technically capable yet historically timid, morally theatrical yet substantively evasive. He senses that institutions once charged with transmitting seriousness—universities, political systems, even elements of business culture—have become performative, defensive, and ideologically exhausted. This element of his diagnosis

should not be underestimated. Much of his appeal lies precisely in the fact that he names the fatigue others prefer to euphemize.

His critique of higher education offers a revealing example. In *The Diversity Myth*, written long before his later prominence as a technologist and investor, Thiel portrays the university not as a living site of truth-seeking but as a space increasingly governed by conformity, administrative theater, and moralized self-description disconnected from intellectual courage. Whether or not one shares the tone or all the arguments, the underlying perception anticipates a broader pattern: institutions tasked with cultivating judgment begin instead to produce symbolic management. They speak more insistently about values while becoming less capable of risk, seriousness, or ontological confidence. This theme recurs, in transformed ways, throughout Thiel's later reflections: stagnation masked as progress, consensus masking fear, proceduralism masking metaphysical vacuum.

The famous libertarian essay he published in 2009 radicalizes the matter. There, the loss of faith in politics is not treated as a temporary disappointment but as a structural conclusion. Democracy is described less as the arena in which freedom might yet be organized than as a mechanism increasingly unable to sustain the conditions of liberty and innovation. The result is a turning away: from electoral hope toward technological alternatives, from territorial politics toward spaces of exit, from the difficult labor of institutional reconstruction toward the cultivation of exceptional projects capable of circumventing public paralysis. Here the move becomes unmistakable. Politics is not reformed; it is displaced. The common world is no longer the primary terrain of action. Freedom migrates toward zones of selective insulation.

This movement is not purely ideological. It reflects a broader transformation in the structure of elite imagination. In a world where states appear slow, legitimacy appears thin, and democratic mediation appears exhausted, the

most dynamic actors increasingly cease to ask how the common world can be renewed and instead ask how they might reduce their dependence upon it. The dream of seasteads, charter cities, private technological sovereignties, elite educational alternatives, encrypted exit systems, and biological asymmetries belongs to this same constellation. What unifies them is not a single policy platform, but a pattern of desire: the desire to preserve intensity, innovation, and agency by withdrawing from the drag of the ordinary political bond.

The intellectual seriousness of this move should not obscure its sociological narrowness. Thiel's response is attractive because it is internally coherent for those with extreme optionality. If one possesses capital, technical leverage, mobility, access to networks of competence, and a horizon not bounded by ordinary dependence on public institutions, then exit can appear more rational than repair. The sovereign individual is most plausible to those already positioned to absorb the costs of sovereignty. For the

majority, however, there is no equivalent exit. Most human beings do not inhabit a world of selective insulation. They remain dependent on schools, hospitals, legal systems, transport infrastructures, public order, territorial continuity, and civic trust. Their problem is not how to transcend the common world but how to survive its decomposition.

This is the first limit of the technolibertarian response: it confuses a strategy of elite adaptation with a principle of civilizational order. A society cannot be organized around the exit options of its strongest actors without accelerating the breakdown of legitimacy for everyone else. The more intelligence, capital, innovation, and ambition detach themselves from the repair of the common world, the more the common world becomes populated by those least able to escape its failures. Under such conditions, resentment deepens, institutions decay further, and the very diagnosis that originally justified exit becomes self-confirming. Technolibertarianism, in this respect, risks becoming not only a

response to decomposition but one of its accelerants.

Yet this criticism, though necessary, remains incomplete unless we ask what it is in Thiel's thought that makes it so compelling to intelligent readers disillusioned with the public vocabulary of the present. The answer lies partly in his refusal of progressive inevitabilism. Thiel does not assume that history naturally bends toward better outcomes. He does not believe that more process automatically means more truth, that more communication means more understanding, or that more inclusionary rhetoric means more substantive freedom. He has grasped, with a lucidity many establishment actors lack, that decline can coexist with abundance, that stagnation can hide behind innovation theater, and that institutional legitimacy can erode even as systems become more administratively complex. In short, he takes decadence seriously.

This seriousness matters because the contemporary order often lacks it. Many elites conti-

nue to speak as though legitimacy were a public-relations issue, as though distrust could be repaired by messaging, and as though institutional fatigue were simply a matter of managing expectations better. Against this flattening, Thiel reintroduces tragedy, conflict, and asymmetry into the interpretation of history. He senses that not every problem is procedural and not every horizon is recoverable by consensus. There is, in his thought, a dark realism about civilizational exhaustion. This realism explains why so many find him more intellectually alive than the official custodians of a system that increasingly seems able only to defend itself in the language of moderation.

And yet it is precisely here that the deeper paradox appears. Thiel perceives the loss of public meaning, but he does not seek to reconstruct a political architecture capable of restoring it on a common basis. Instead, he treats the crisis of the shared world as evidence that the shared world itself may no longer be the right scale of aspiration. The result is not a politics of

reconstitution but a politics of asymmetry. The exceptional entrepreneur becomes the bearer of historical agency. Technical innovation replaces public judgment as the privileged mode of action. The horizon of freedom becomes selective rather than universalizable. What had once been a problem of the polity becomes, increasingly, a problem of who can get free of it.

This is why libertarianism, in the form most relevant here, should be understood less as a doctrine of liberty than as a symptom of broken confidence in mediating institutions. Its growth signals that public forms no longer persuade the most capable actors that common structures remain worthy of investment, patience, or loyalty. The libertarian turn is thus not merely a belief system. It is a diagnosis converted into withdrawal. It says: if the institutions of the common world no longer generate seriousness, horizon, reciprocity, or courage, then freedom must be sought elsewhere. The force of the argument lies not in its anthropology alone but in the empirical weakness of its alternatives.

The difficulty, however, is that a civilization cannot live by elite withdrawal. It may survive it for a time, especially if material abundance remains high. But it cannot derive legitimacy from it. A political order requires more than islands of intensity. It requires forms of mutual visibility and shared answerability that make power inhabitable by those who do not control its deepest levers. Here Thiel's thought begins to expose its own insufficiency. He understands that liberal institutions have lost nerve, but he does not fully account for the fact that the erosion of common institutions will not produce a stable meritocratic frontier. It will produce zones of radical asymmetry, intensified dependence, and increasingly theatrical conflict between protected enclaves and abandoned majorities.

One sees this most clearly when technological power begins to extend beyond the economy narrowly conceived and enters domains such as surveillance, classification, warfare, platform governance, and, increasingly, biotechnological

life extension. In such domains, the question is no longer merely whether private innovation is more efficient than public management. The question becomes whether a civilization can tolerate the privatization of decisions that shape the distribution of recognition, risk, and even biological time. A world in which some actors can purchase longer futures, thicker protections, stronger informational leverage, and more exit opportunities than others is not simply unequal in the classical sense. It is normatively bifurcated. It distributes ontological security itself.

This point becomes decisive because Thiel's critique of what he has called "Edenism" touches a real civilizational nerve. He is right to challenge the sentimental glorification of limitation, suffering, and mortality when such glorification becomes an alibi for technical laziness or moralized stagnation. He is right to intuit that biotechnology may become one of the defining political questions of the century. He is right, too, that the future of civilization cannot

be thought exclusively in terms inherited from twentieth-century welfare politics. But once again, the question is not whether the diagnosis contains truth. It is whether the response remains politically universalizable. If the struggle against decline, illness, and premature death is organized through selective access, private leverage, and asymmetrical enhancement, then the civilizational question does not disappear. It intensifies. The issue becomes not whether humanity can extend its powers, but under what architecture of justice those powers will be distributed.

This is where the idea of the Capitalism of Meaning diverges fundamentally from the technolibertarian horizon. It does not reject technological ambition. It does not romanticize the State as it exists. It does not deny that many public institutions have become exhausted, performative, or structurally incapable of serious action. But it refuses to conclude from this that freedom must be detached from common life. Its wager is different: that the decay of institu-

tions must lead not to the abandonment of mediation, but to its reinvention; not to exit as civilizational principle, but to new architectures of accountability, thirdness, and reintegration capable of making transformation socially bearable again.

At this point, the significance of Thiel as symptom becomes fully clear. He shows us what happens when a brilliant mind takes decomposition seriously but loses confidence that the common world can still be reauthored. His thought is not trivial because it is extreme. It is instructive because it is honest about elite temptation in an age of public fatigue. It reveals the seduction of a world in which the intelligent stop asking how to rebuild shared forms and instead ask how far private sovereignty can be scaled. This temptation is not confined to one thinker. It increasingly haunts sectors of technological power, finance, and strategic culture wherever institutional exhaustion is perceived as irreversible.

To respond adequately, one must neither sentimentalize democracy nor underestimate the force of the critique. It is not enough to say that public institutions matter. One must show why and under what transformed conditions they can once again become worthy of seriousness. This is one of the central ambitions of the argument that follows. The Capitalism of Meaning is, among other things, an answer to the question Thiel leaves unresolved: how can one acknowledge the failure of exhausted liberal forms without surrendering the future to oligarchic asymmetry, private sovereignty, and selective exit?

The answer cannot be moral exhortation. It must be structural. It must begin from the recognition that no civilization can remain stable if its most dynamic forces systematically detach themselves from the work of making transformation intelligible, accountable, and collectively endurable. It must insist that innovation without reintegration produces not freedom but volatility; that private intensity cannot substitu-

te for public legitimacy; and that a polity worthy of the future must develop institutions capable of bearing conflict without denying it, directing technology without fetishizing it, and preserving human answerability within systems increasingly tempted by procedural and algorithmic closure.

For this reason, the paradox of Thiel is not an intellectual curiosity. It is one of the key thresholds of the present. In him, we see both the lucidity of the diagnosis and the insufficiency of the remedy. He names the twilight, but he does not rebuild the city. And it is precisely because he cannot rebuild it that the next question becomes unavoidable: what kind of anthropology of conflict, desire, and authority has dissolved beneath the present order, making both resentment below and libertarian withdrawal above appear increasingly plausible? To answer that question, one must turn to a thinker who diagnosed not only institutional fatigue, but the mimetic instability hidden beneath modern social life: René Girard.

CHAPTER 3

MIMETIC DESIRE AND THE END OF AUTHORITY

If resentment marks the social surface of decomposition, and technolibertarian withdrawal expresses one of its elite responses, there still remains a deeper question: what kind of anthropological instability has made both phenomena intelligible at the same historical moment? Why do institutions that retain immense technical and administrative capacity increasingly fail to command symbolic authority? Why does social comparison intensify even in societies saturated with procedural equality? Why does the presence of more information, more visibility, and more formal inclusion so often coincide with more rivalry, more humiliation, and more contagious distrust? To answer these questions,

one must move beneath the language of governance and enter the more dangerous terrain of desire itself.

René Girard remains indispensable here not because he offers a ready-made political doctrine, but because he identifies a structural mechanism that liberal modernity has never fully mastered: the mimetic character of human desire. We do not desire in isolation. We learn what to want by observing what others want, value, possess, or embody. Desire is therefore not merely individual appetite directed toward inert objects. It is triangular, relational, contagious. Others do not simply stand before us as competitors for goods; they first appear as models who silently instruct us in what is desirable. The tragedy begins when the model becomes also the obstacle. The very figure who confers value upon the object or status we seek is the figure who stands in the way of our possessing it. Admiration and hostility become inseparable.

This insight, though anthropological in origin, has immense political significance. It helps

explain why social conflict in advanced modernity no longer follows only the classical lines of scarcity, class position, or institutional exclusion. Much contemporary conflict is intensified by proximity rather than distance, by formal equality rather than clearly codified hierarchy, by visibility rather than secrecy. The more societies insist that all subjects are interchangeable in dignity, comparable in aspiration, and potentially eligible for the same goods, the more explosive the mimetic field can become when actual access remains asymmetrical. Equality of claim does not eliminate rivalry. It often radicalizes it.

This is one reason why the present crisis cannot be understood solely through economic categories, however important they remain. It is not enough to say that people are excluded; one must also ask from what symbolic order of recognition they feel excluded, and by whom they experience themselves as being silently judged, imitated, displaced, or rendered inferior. In a world saturated with images, rankings, metrics,

influence economies, and perpetual visibility, the mimetic field becomes denser and more unstable. Every life is measured against the staged intensities of other lives. Every desire risks becoming comparative. Every failure risks becoming humiliation before an audience. Under these conditions, institutions do not merely lose efficiency or trust. They lose their capacity to mediate desire.

The concept of authority must be rethought from this angle. In its strongest sense, authority is not mere command, nor sheer coercive power, nor even procedural legitimacy. Authority exists where a person, office, or institution can serve as a model without immediately becoming a rival. It stabilizes the social field by orienting aspiration without converting every aspiration into direct antagonism. When authority functions, it creates distance without humiliation and hierarchy without permanent mimetic escalation. This is why the crisis of authority is so serious. It means not simply that people obey less. It means that the figures and insti-

tutions meant to orient common life are no longer experienced as credible models. They are increasingly seen either as hollow performers or as competitors disguised as guardians.

This transformation helps illuminate one of the most pervasive features of our age: the collapse of vertical legitimacy into horizontal suspicion. Elites once possessed, however imperfectly, an aura connected to office, competence, sacrifice, or symbolic distance. That aura has eroded. In some cases it deserved to erode, because authority had become corrupt, complacent, extractive, or hypocritical. But the decline of false authority does not automatically yield emancipated pluralism. It often produces a mimetic free-for-all in which no figure can orient desire without immediately becoming the object of rivalry, projection, or punitive exposure. The leader becomes an influencer, the professor a performer, the expert a partisan, the judge a player, the institution a brand. In such a field, distrust becomes not episodic but atmospheric.

The digital condition intensifies this dramatically. Social media did not invent mimetic desire, but it industrialized its circulation. It collapsed distances, accelerated imitation, rendered prestige instantly visible and instantly contestable, and transformed attention itself into a measurable and rivalrous good. The result is not merely distraction. It is a new ecology of comparison in which subjects are perpetually exposed to models they can neither fully emulate nor fully ignore. This has at least three consequences. First, desire becomes more unstable because it is continually redirected by signals emitted at high velocity. Second, frustration becomes more personalized because obstacles appear embodied in visible others rather than in impersonal structures. Third, conflict becomes more contagious because rivalry can spread across networks faster than institutions can metabolize it.

In such an environment, the old liberal hope that transparency would pacify power reveals its limits. Visibility does not necessarily calm

social life. It can intensify rivalry by multiplying objects of comparison and shortening the distance between model and imitator. Nor does formal inclusion automatically stabilize desire. On the contrary, where symbolic prestige remains scarce but universally displayed, inclusion can increase the number of subjects authorized to desire the same markers of recognition without creating institutions capable of ordering those desires into non-destructive forms. A society of generalized comparability without credible mediating structures is a society primed for resentment.

This is why Girard is especially useful for thinking the end of authority. He reminds us that peace does not depend only on justice in the distributive sense. It also depends on the existence of symbolic arrangements capable of deflecting rivalry, naming boundaries, and preventing social energies from collapsing into mimetic escalation. Traditional societies often achieved this through hierarchy, ritual, taboo, and sacralized distance, though at immense

moral and political cost. Modern societies, by contrast, sought to universalize dignity, soften hierarchy, and expose power to critique. This achievement was immense and irreversible. But it also destabilized older mechanisms that once contained rivalry, without necessarily replacing them with equally powerful forms of mediation.

The result is a peculiar modern vulnerability. We have delegitimized many of the visible forms of hierarchy that once structured aspiration, but we have not eliminated the mimetic engine itself. Desire remains contagious. Recognition remains scarce. Prestige remains rivalrous. Only now these forces operate in a moral universe that officially condemns domination while practically amplifying comparison. This contradiction lies at the heart of the contemporary crisis of authority. No one wishes to return to sacralized domination. Yet without institutions capable of orienting desire and absorbing conflict, equality itself can become mimetically destabilizing.

This point is often missed in contemporary political analysis because authority is usually treated as either repressive residue or procedural office. But authority is more than either. It is a civilizational technology of non-rivalrous orientation. It permits admiration without immediate cannibalization. It creates symbolic asymmetries that do not necessarily humiliate. It protects shared worlds from becoming theaters of uninterrupted comparison. When authority collapses, societies do not automatically become freer in any substantial sense. They often become noisier, more punitive, more unstable, and more vulnerable to charismatic substitutes who promise order precisely because institutional authority has become incredible.

The rise of such substitutes is not accidental. When institutions cease to mediate desire, personal figures step in. Some do so through populist performance, staging themselves as unfiltered embodiments of grievance. Others do so through technocratic certainty, offering the reassurance of model-based necessity. Others still

do so through algorithmic architectures that sort, rank, and direct attention in ways subjects experience as objective even when they remain opaque. In each case, authority does not disappear. It mutates. What disappears is accountable, publicly inhabitable authority. In its place emerge rival forms of fascination, management, and emotional capture.

This mutation is central to the broader argument of this book because it explains why institutional crises today are so rarely solved by more information alone. One can reveal facts, disclose procedures, publish metrics, and still fail to restore authority if the mimetic field remains disordered. Publics do not need only transparency; they need forms of credible orientation. They need institutions capable of bearing asymmetry without hypocrisy and of exercising judgment without collapsing into domination or spectacle. This is a much harder problem than contemporary governance discourse often admits.

Girard also helps illuminate why elites, once they lose moral authority, become especially vulnerable to hatred. In a mimetic framework, the model that disappoints becomes the obstacle that must be symbolically overthrown. Resentment toward elites is not simply envy in the vulgar sense, nor merely the ideological manipulation of frustrated masses. It often contains the bitterness of betrayed imitation. People are angriest not at remote abstractions but at figures or classes once presented as guides to legitimate aspiration—politicians, experts, professionals, executives, cultural leaders—when those figures come to seem fraudulent, self-protective, or structurally insulated from the consequences of the transformations they administer. The issue is not only that elites have more. It is that they continue to occupy the symbolic place of authority after forfeiting the moral conditions required to inhabit it.

Here one can better grasp the relation between mimetic desire and the crisis of trust explored in the previous chapter. Trust decays not

only when institutions fail materially, but when they cease to orient aspiration in ways perceived as truthful. A society can forgive inequality more easily than hypocrisy. It can tolerate hierarchy more easily than bad faith. It can survive difficult decisions more easily than the sense that those who make them are untouched by the burdens they impose. The mimetic dimension sharpens each of these experiences because it renders social life more comparative, more affectively charged, and more vulnerable to humiliation. Once humiliation becomes politically ambient, trust becomes extraordinarily difficult to rebuild.

This is one reason why contemporary governance so often oscillates between sentimental language and punitive technique. Institutions that no longer command authority try to compensate through therapeutic vocabulary on the one hand and procedural control on the other. They announce values, inclusion, and care, while expanding metrics, protocols, audits, and compliance systems. Yet neither pole restores

the missing center. Sentimental language cannot substitute for credible authority, and procedural control cannot produce symbolic legitimacy. In fact, their combination often deepens cynicism, because subjects experience it as a performance of moral concern overlaying a machinery of impersonal management.

At this point, the relevance of Girard to the technolibertarian question also becomes clearer. One reason figures such as Thiel are drawn toward exceptionalism, sovereign individuality, and selective exit is that they no longer believe the common symbolic order can stabilize rivalry without flattening excellence. They intuit, often correctly, that institutions have become too weak, theatrical, or resentful to bear real asymmetry. But the remedy they gravitate toward—withdrawal into zones of private intensity—does not resolve the mimetic crisis. It merely relocates it within more selective structures. The problem remains unresolved because desire, prestige, and rivalry do not disappear at the frontier. They become concentrated among the

few, while the common world is left even less capable of mediation.

The political implication is severe. A viable order cannot be built either on the denial of asymmetry or on its unaccountable privatization. It must instead develop institutions capable of holding asymmetry truthfully—recognizing excellence, responsibility, and difference without allowing these to harden into opaque superiority or mimetic humiliation. This requires a concept of authority very different from both authoritarian nostalgia and flat procedural egalitarianism. It requires authority rooted not in unanswerable status but in publicly inhabitable forms of judgment, exposure to consequence, and the capacity to orient collective life without withdrawing from it.

Such authority cannot simply be declared. It must be institutionally composed. It depends on structures that protect decision from spectacle, responsibility from diffusion, and conflict from either denial or theatrical exploitation. It depends on threshold spaces in which difficult

choices can still be interrogated before closure, where asymmetries can be rendered intelligible without being mythologized, and where sacrifice can be named rather than naturalized. In the vocabulary that will become more important as this book proceeds, one might say that societies need institutions of thirdness—spaces that neither collapse into direct rivalry nor retreat into technocratic opacity.

The end of authority, then, should not be understood as a simple liberation from hierarchy. It is better grasped as the collapse of non-rivalrous mediation. When that collapse occurs, societies become more vulnerable to resentment from below, to withdrawal from above, and to increasingly desperate searches for visible bearers of invisible disorder. Scapegoating becomes easier because authority no longer contains rivalry. Populist identification becomes more intense because institutional distance no longer commands trust. Algorithmic governance becomes more seductive because procedural objectivity appears preferable to openly discredited

human judgment. Each of these responses grows within the vacuum left by the erosion of credible authority.

The broader thesis of this chapter can therefore be stated plainly. The crisis of our age is not only economic, institutional, or technological. It is also mimetic. It concerns the destabilization of desire in societies that have weakened traditional hierarchies without building sufficiently truthful and legitimate mediating structures in their place. It concerns the loss of authority in a world where visibility multiplies rivals faster than institutions can produce meaning. And it concerns the resulting tendency to oscillate between diffuse resentment, charismatic compensation, and technocratic closure.

A Capitalism of Meaning must therefore be more than a theory of redistribution or governance reform. It must also be a theory of how modern societies can once again organize aspiration, conflict, and recognition without surrendering either to sacrificial violence or to oligarchic exit. This does not mean restoring sacred

order in any archaic sense. It means confronting the anthropological depth of the crisis instead of treating it as a communications problem or a temporary political misalignment. Without this deeper confrontation, every institutional reform will remain fragile, because the mimetic field in which institutions operate will continue to corrode their authority from within.

The next step is to move from the anthropology of rivalry to the structure of power in the digital age. For if mimetic destabilization helps explain the crisis of authority, it still leaves open a further question: who decides under conditions in which authority has weakened, responsibility has diffused, and procedures increasingly hide the political substance of choice? This is the question that leads us from Girard to sovereignty, and from sovereignty to the algorithmic order now claiming neutrality while silently distributing recognition, exclusion, and risk.

CHAPTER 4

THE ALGORITHM AS SOVEREIGN: WHO DECIDES IN THE DIGITAL STATE OF EXCEPTION?

If the previous chapter showed that the crisis of modern societies is also a crisis of authority and mediation, the present chapter asks a harsher question: what happens to sovereignty when decision does not disappear, but withdraws behind procedure, model, and machine? For all the contemporary rhetoric about data-driven governance, predictive analytics, intelligent systems, and automated optimization, the decisive issue is not whether algorithms are powerful. The decisive issue is whether they have become one of the privileged masks through which po-

wer can continue to decide while refusing to appear as decision. This is where the problem becomes genuinely political. We are no longer dealing only with technical tools. We are confronting a transformation in the architecture of answerability itself.

Carl Schmitt's famous proposition that sovereign is he who decides on the exception remains disturbing not because it can simply be transplanted into the present, but because it forces us to ask where real decision occurs when normal procedures are no longer sufficient to explain outcomes. The exception, in Schmitt's sense, reveals who truly holds power because it shows who can suspend ordinary norms and determine what counts as necessity. In the digital age, however, the exception often no longer presents itself dramatically. It is not always declared. It is distributed. It arrives embedded in classification systems, ranking logics, risk models, predictive flags, recommendation architectures, fraud scores, credit scores, triage systems, platform moderation, policing tools, in-

surance assessments, and administrative automation. The crucial point is that these infrastructures do not merely execute pre-existing norms. Increasingly, they shape the field in which norms become operationally real.

This shift has profound consequences. In classical political modernity, sovereignty was attached, however imperfectly, to visible offices, identifiable chains of command, and institutions formally charged with decision. In the algorithmic condition, sovereignty tends to become infrastructural. It migrates from the visible act of command to the hidden calibration of thresholds, categories, defaults, and confidence levels. It becomes less theatrical and more ambient. Yet this migration does not make it less political. On the contrary, it makes the political content of decision harder to see precisely where its effects become more pervasive. The question is no longer only who signed the order, but who designed the criteria, chose the variables, weighted the proxies, defined the objective function, authorized the deployment, validated

the outputs, and normalized the idea that this was not a decision but a technical process.

At this point one must resist a recurrent simplification. The danger of algorithmic systems does not lie only in opacity, bias, or error, though all are important. Nor does it lie simply in the fact that some models are proprietary and therefore difficult to scrutinize. The deeper problem is that algorithms can participate in the depoliticization of consequential choice. They can render acts of distribution, exclusion, prioritization, and suspicion as though they were the neutral unfolding of a model rather than the exercise of judgment under conditions of asymmetry. In this way, they become instruments of what might be called moral buffering: devices through which human actors can continue to exercise power while experiencing themselves as less responsible for its burden.

Moral buffering is one of the defining pathologies of the contemporary order. It occurs whenever the structure surrounding a decision enables its makers, administrators, or beneficia-

ries to experience the outcome as necessary, objective, or system-generated, thereby reducing the felt weight of agency. A hiring system screens. A platform moderates. A welfare algorithm flags. A hospital model prioritizes. A predictive tool ranks. A security architecture identifies anomalies. At every stage, human beings remain present: in design, procurement, governance, implementation, and appeal. But the form of presence changes. Agency is no longer publicly inhabited as decision. It is distributed across layers in such a way that no single actor fully occupies its political meaning. The result is not the absence of sovereignty, but sovereignty without confession.

To understand the significance of this, it is useful to distinguish between automation and closure. Automation in itself is not new, nor inherently illegitimate. Societies have always developed technical means of standardizing repetitive tasks, increasing consistency, and reducing arbitrariness. Closure is different. Closure occurs when the technical mediation of a pro-

cess begins to foreclose the human and political space in which that process could still be interrogated as a decision. A system becomes dangerous not merely when it computes, but when its computation is socially received as the last meaningful word. Closure is thus not a property of code alone. It is a relation between technical architecture, institutional design, legal framing, organizational culture, and public imagination.

This is why the ideal of transparency, though important, is insufficient. Much contemporary debate assumes that the main challenge of algorithmic governance is to "open the black box." But even where systems are partially explainable, auditable, or documented, the decisive question remains: explainable to whom, at what stage, and with what effect on the actual possibility of contestation? A perfectly documented injustice can remain politically intolerable if the human subject confronting it has no meaningful access to revision, no identifiable bearer of responsibility, and no institution capable of re-

opening the decision once the machine has spoken. Transparency without re-politicization risks becoming merely a pedagogical supplement to power.

The language of risk management further complicates the picture. Contemporary institutions increasingly justify algorithmic infrastructures by invoking efficiency, consistency, scalability, fraud reduction, resource optimization, or harm prevention. These are not trivial goods. In many domains, decision-makers face volumes, velocities, and complexities that render purely individualized human adjudication impractical. Yet precisely because these pressures are real, risk management becomes one of the most powerful languages through which exceptional forms of authority can enter ordinary administration. The more institutions define themselves through anticipatory control—of fraud, disorder, failure, deviance, error, and uncertainty—the more they are tempted to privilege systems that sort subjects before they act, classify them before they speak, and rank them

before they are heard. Under such conditions, prevention begins to colonize judgment.

One might therefore say that the digital state of exception is not simply an emergency regime. It is a condition in which the exceptional logic of anticipatory intervention seeps into normal governance through technical systems presented as neutral tools of administration. No one announces the suspension of ordinary political judgment. Yet it is quietly narrowed. Decisions become pre-structured by scores, flags, automated triage, behavioral predictions, and optimization targets long before any accountable human subject visibly enters the scene. The exception becomes ordinary precisely because it is infrastructural rather than spectacular.

This helps explain why many citizens experience algorithmic environments as strangely impersonal and strangely invasive at once. They are impersonal because no one appears to will their exclusion directly; the outcome is framed as the output of a system. Yet they are invasive because the system reaches deeply into

domains once buffered by discretion, interpretation, or human encounter. Creditworthiness, employability, insurability, welfare eligibility, riskiness, visibility, and trustworthiness become increasingly shaped by processes whose logic is both intimate in effect and remote in responsibility. The subject is known statistically but not encountered politically.

The consequences for legitimacy are severe. A political order remains bearable in part because those subject to decision can still imagine that someone, somewhere, owns the burden of deciding. This does not mean decisions become pleasant or universally accepted. It means they remain symbolically locatable. When locatability disappears, trust corrodes. Individuals do not simply feel wronged. They feel processed. And being processed is a peculiar kind of civic injury. It implies not only disadvantage, but depersonalization without innocence: one is judged without ever meeting a judge, ranked without ever confronting a ranking mind, exposed wi-

thout ever seeing the sovereign threshold that assigned one's place.

At this point, Schmitt's relevance returns in transformed form. Sovereignty in the algorithmic condition belongs less to the visible decider than to the architecture that determines when and how ordinary human judgment can still intervene. The sovereign question is no longer only "who decides?" but also "who decides the conditions under which decisions appear as non-decisions?" Who determines which domains are suitable for automation, which thresholds trigger suspicion, which variables count as legitimate proxies, which appeals are possible, and which harms are acceptable in the name of scale? To ask these questions is already to re-enter politics. It is to refuse the fantasy that technology merely implements choices made elsewhere. In reality, the design and deployment of such systems often constitute the choice.

The platform economy offers a particularly revealing illustration. Major digital platforms

do not merely host expression, commerce, or visibility. They continuously organize the terms under which recognition is distributed. Recommendation systems elevate some voices and bury others. Moderation frameworks distinguish the tolerable from the intolerable. Ranking architectures reorder access to markets, publics, and attention. None of these acts are politically innocent. They shape the conditions of social visibility and therefore the conditions of civic existence. Yet because they are embedded in proprietary systems, terms-of-service logics, machine-assisted moderation, and statistical optimization, they are often experienced as quasi-natural features of the environment rather than as decisions about the architecture of public life.

Similar dynamics unfold in public administration. Automated systems used for benefit allocation, fraud detection, immigration screening, predictive policing, school admissions, or public-health prioritization do not merely improve administrative speed. They alter the

grammar of the citizen's relation to the state. The citizen increasingly confronts not an official who may err, justify, deliberate, or be challenged, but a procedural surface whose reasons are fragmented across technical documentation, legal disclaimers, vendor contracts, policy assumptions, and machine outputs. Each component may be individually explicable; together they produce a field in which responsibility is diluted to the point of near-evaporation. What emerges is not a stronger rule of law, but a more elusive administrative sovereignty.

At this point, some defenders of algorithmic governance reply that humans are no better. Human decision-makers are biased, inconsistent, emotional, discriminatory, overburdened, and opaque in their own ways. This objection is partly true, and any serious argument must concede it. The issue is not whether unaided human judgment should nostalgically be restored as the gold standard. The issue is whether systems can be designed in such a way that technical support does not annihilate human

answerability. The alternative to crude automation is not romantic discretion. It is institutionally structured judgment in which technical tools remain subordinate to publicly inhabitable processes of responsibility.

This distinction is essential because many contemporary debates are framed too crudely: automation versus inefficiency, scale versus arbitrariness, AI versus bureaucracy, innovation versus backwardness. Such oppositions conceal the real problem. The problem is not whether institutions should use complex tools. The problem is whether those tools are embedded within architectures that preserve the possibility of meaningful human interruption, contestation, and accountability. A system may be highly advanced technically and still remain politically acceptable if it leaves open the space in which decisions can be re-owned by answerable institutions. Conversely, a system may be accurate on average and still be normatively corrosive if it closes that space and teaches everyone

involved to experience political judgment as a nuisance or afterthought.

The phrase meaningful human control has become common in regulatory discussions, especially around high-risk AI. But its meaning is often thinner than the phrase suggests. Too often it is reduced to a formal checkpoint: a human signs off, reviews samples, or retains theoretical override power without actually inhabiting the substantive burden of judgment. Such arrangements can be worse than no human control at all, because they create the appearance of accountability without its reality. Meaningful human control must be understood more rigorously. It does not mean merely that a human is somewhere in the loop. It means that an answerable human or institutional subject remains capable of understanding the stakes of the decision, interrupting the technical flow before closure, justifying the choice in publicly intelligible terms, and bearing the consequences of that justification.

This requirement implies that some decisions cannot be adequately governed by ex post audit alone. By the time harm appears on a dashboard, the normatively decisive moment may already have passed. What matters is the predecisional zone in which the use of a system, the framing of a problem, the weighting of a risk, and the acceptance of a proxy are still open to challenge. Once closure has occurred, appeal often becomes residual. This is why the architecture of legitimate decision in the digital age must include threshold spaces—sites in which technical, legal, ethical, and political considerations can still encounter one another before being frozen into model logic and procedural inevitability.

Such threshold spaces are not luxuries. They are among the last institutional defenses against sovereignty dissolving into infrastructure. They are also among the few means by which a society can preserve the distinction between support and substitution, between augmentation and abdication, between administration and silent ex-

ception. Without them, the migration of sovereignty into systems will continue, and public life will increasingly be governed by what no one is prepared to name as decision.

This is where the argument of the previous chapters converges. Resentment grows where transformation is experienced without intelligible justification. Technolibertarian exit grows where elites no longer trust the common world to carry agency. Mimetic destabilization grows where institutions cease to orient desire and authority loses credibility. The algorithmic condition intensifies all three. It offers a way to manage distrust without rebuilding trust, to exercise power without inhabiting responsibility, and to organize life chances without exposing the political content of the organization. In this sense, the algorithm becomes a sovereign not because it is conscious, but because it helps structure a regime in which decisions of great consequence can be rendered effective while remaining weakly confessable.

A Capitalism of Meaning must reject this trajectory at its root. Not by refusing technical systems as such, nor by retreating into nostalgia for pre-digital administration, but by insisting that every consequential architecture of classification, prioritization, and intervention remains subordinated to humanly inhabitable forms of judgment. It must insist that no optimization target is politically innocent, that no proxy is free of normative content, that no automated threshold should escape public intelligibility simply because it scales. Above all, it must insist that the burden of deciding cannot be abolished through distribution across code, contract, dashboard, and machine output. Where the burden remains, so too must answerability.

The chapter therefore closes with a proposition that will guide the remainder of the book: the central challenge of the digital age is not only to regulate intelligent systems, but to prevent the disappearance of decision into technical closure. The real danger is not merely that algorithms may err. It is that societies may be-

come accustomed to living under architectures of silent exception in which power continues to sort, rank, include, exclude, and pre-judge while no one any longer appears in the full dignity and weight of the decider.

Once this is understood, another question becomes unavoidable. If algorithmic systems cannot be left to neutralize responsibility, on what conception of judgment can a humane order rely? What concept of the human good can orient decisions in a world increasingly governed by statistical normality, predictive modeling, and technical plausibility? To answer that, one must turn from sovereignty to teleology, from the politics of hidden decision to the philosophical question of whether reason can still distinguish what works from what is right.

CHAPTER 5

NATURAL RIGHT AND ARTIFICIAL REASON

The previous chapter argued that the decisive problem of the digital age is not merely the spread of powerful technical tools, but the migration of consequential choice into architectures that weaken the public visibility of decision. Yet once this point is granted, another question immediately arises. Even if one were able to restore visible accountability, on what basis should judgment be exercised? What normative horizon can orient decision in a world increasingly governed by statistical inference, predictive modeling, optimization routines, and systems whose strength lies in their capacity to identify regularities rather than ends? In other words: if the crisis of our age concerns not only

sovereignty but teleology, what becomes of the distinction between what works and what is right?

This question cannot be answered within technical reason alone, because technical reason is structurally indifferent to the good except insofar as the good can be translated into an objective function. It can optimize means once ends are selected, compare pathways once criteria are formalized, and detect patterns once variables are defined. But it cannot, by its own procedures, determine why a society ought to privilege one conception of flourishing over another, why certain risks are tolerable and others are not, why some asymmetries are justifiable while others are degrading, or why efficiency must sometimes yield before dignity, meaning, or the integrity of common life. To say this is not to diminish technical intelligence. It is to recognize its formal nature. Artificial reason, however sophisticated, remains structurally secondary with respect to the ends it is asked to serve.

The temptation of our time is to forget this distinction. As institutions become more dependent on calculative systems, there is a growing tendency to treat what is statistically legible as normatively authoritative. If a pattern recurs at scale, it begins to appear reasonable. If a prediction outperforms unaided human judgment on a benchmark, it begins to appear justified. If a risk can be quantified, it begins to appear governable in a morally sufficient sense. Through this subtle slide, modern societies drift toward a new positivism—not the classical legal positivism that separated law from morality, but a statistical positivism that grants increasing normative prestige to whatever can be rendered measurable, predictable, and operationally effective.

It is here that Leo Strauss becomes unexpectedly relevant to the digital age. Strauss's critique of modernity was never reducible to nostalgia for premodern order. What concerned him above all was the erosion of the question of the good under the twin pressures of historicism and positivism. Once human reason ceases to

ask what is just by nature and confines itself to describing facts, comparing preferences, or administering accepted procedures, it loses the capacity to distinguish between order and right order, between stability and legitimacy, between what exists and what deserves to endure. The risk is not merely intellectual impoverishment. It is political and civilizational disarmament. A society that no longer knows how to ask what a human being is for will eventually govern human beings as variables within systems whose ends were never truly chosen.

The contemporary relevance of this diagnosis lies in the way artificial systems intensify the separation between norm and pattern. Machine learning systems do not proceed by identifying what ought to be. They identify correlations, optimize predictions, cluster similarities, estimate probabilities, and derive operational utility from data-rich environments. This is extraordinarily powerful in domains where the relevant good is tightly specifiable and the cost of error can be clearly modeled. But where hu-

man life is concerned in its political, ethical, and existential density, such systems risk producing a silent substitution: normality begins to masquerade as normativity. What is common is taken to be what is appropriate. What is probable is taken to be what is prudent. What can be ranked is taken to be what should be decided.

This substitution is dangerous because political life is not exhausted by regularity. Human communities are constituted not only by recurrent behaviors but by claims about justice, dignity, sacrifice, freedom, and limits. These claims cannot be inferred from data alone, because data arise within worlds already structured by choices, exclusions, institutions, and asymmetries. Every dataset is sedimented history. Every model is trained on a world whose injustices may be regular enough to appear normal. In such a condition, artificial reason can become a magnificent instrument for reproducing the visible surface of an order while remaining silent about whether that order is worth reproducing.

At this point, one might object that human judgment has never been pure, teleological, or immune from history either. This is true. Human beings do not stand outside their contexts, and appeals to "natural right" can certainly become ideological masks. But the abuse of a concept does not remove the need it addresses. The point of recalling natural right in the present context is not to invoke an archaic metaphysics as a shortcut to certainty. It is to recover the principle that there remain questions of justice, human purpose, and political good that cannot be collapsed into procedural validity, historical trend, market preference, or predictive efficiency. Without some such recovery, all governance becomes administration of whatever already prevails.

One of the clearest signs of this drift can be seen in the language of AI alignment, ethics, and safety. Much of this discourse remains trapped within a technical frame. The central problem is posed as one of aligning systems with human values, reducing risk, preventing

harms, or ensuring fairness across measurable categories. These aims matter. Yet they often leave untouched the prior and harder question: what conception of the human is presupposed by the values being operationalized? Fairness between what ends? Safety for what kind of life? Alignment with which anthropology? A system may be extremely well aligned with a shallow conception of preference satisfaction while remaining blind to the goods that make a political community more than a market of desires.

This is why the distinction between reason and artificial reason matters so much. Human reason, at its best, is not merely calculative. It is also interrogative, self-limiting, and capable of asking whether a thing that can be done ought to be done, under what conditions, for whom, and at what cost to the shape of life as a whole. It can ask not only how to allocate efficiently, but what deserves protection even at the cost of efficiency. It can recognize goods that resist commensuration: loyalty, truthfulness, the dignity of persons, the meaning of work, the legi-

timacy conferred by shared sacrifice, the educational value of encounter, the political significance of being heard by a human being rather than processed by a system. Artificial reason, by contrast, does not err because it lacks intelligence. It errs because it lacks intrinsic orientation toward ends not already formalized for it.

This distinction becomes decisive wherever institutions confront what might be called thick decisions: decisions whose consequences cannot be adequately captured by immediate outputs because they shape relations of trust, symbolic recognition, temporal expectation, or civic standing. A welfare system deciding whether to automate eligibility screening is not only making an efficiency choice. It is deciding what kind of relation will exist between the vulnerable citizen and the public order. A hospital using triage algorithms is not only managing scarce resources. It is deciding how life, urgency, and worth will be interpreted at the threshold of suffering. A school system using predictive tools is not only sorting students. It is

participating in the social inscription of possibility. In each case, technical tools may help. But if the governing horizon becomes purely operational, the institution risks forgetting what kind of good it exists to serve.

Here the concept of telos must be reintroduced with care. Telos does not mean a simplistic blueprint of human perfection, nor an authoritarian imposition of one way of life. It means, more modestly and more profoundly, that political and institutional forms cannot be judged only by their internal coherence or external performance. They must also be judged by the kind of human beings and shared world they tend to cultivate. Does a given arrangement deepen passivity or agency? Does it thicken or thin the conditions of trust? Does it sustain the dignity of exposure to institutions, or transform persons into data points and risk profiles? Does it allow the burdens of common life to remain politically visible, or does it silently absorb them into machine-administered thresholds?

These are teleological questions even when they appear in contemporary institutional dress.

The modern reluctance to speak in such terms has understandable roots. Appeals to ends have often justified domination, paternalism, and exclusion. Proceduralism promised a way to organize plural societies without metaphysical coercion. It sought peace through neutrality, restraint, and formal fairness. This achievement should not be dismissed. But neutrality becomes dangerous when it hardens into blindness about the substantive anthropologies already embedded in social systems. Markets presuppose a certain image of the actor. Bureaucracies presuppose a certain image of the citizen. Platforms presuppose a certain image of attention. AI systems presuppose a certain image of intelligence, preference, and governability. There is no view from nowhere. The refusal to name ends does not eliminate them; it merely obscures which ends are already governing in practice.

What artificial reason intensifies, then, is not the replacement of normativity by pure mechanism, but the concealment of normativity within mechanism. Systems appear neutral because they operate through formal methods, yet every formal method depends upon decisions about goals, tolerable error, relevant proxies, protected interests, and acceptable trade-offs. The danger is that these decisions, once encoded, lose their visible status as contestable judgments and reappear as technical facts. Society then begins to inhabit an environment normatively shaped by ends that no one is prepared to defend in their full moral and political significance.

The problem becomes especially acute when one considers the domain of biopolitics and longevity, which later chapters will explore more fully. If artificial reason is increasingly used to allocate healthcare resources, stratify medical risk, accelerate drug discovery, personalize interventions, and eventually shape access to life-extending technologies, then the

question of the human good cannot remain abstract. It becomes concrete in the distribution of biological time itself. A society may find itself extraordinarily capable of extending life while deeply incapable of deciding justly who should benefit, under what principles, and with what consequences for civic equality. In such a world, the collapse of teleological reasoning would not simply be philosophical. It would become a new architecture of injustice.

This is why Strauss's insistence on the enduring question of natural right matters even if one does not follow him into all his conclusions. He reminds us that the human problem cannot be exhausted by method. A society may become increasingly advanced in its capacity to classify, predict, and administer while becoming increasingly timid in its capacity to ask first questions. What is justice? What is a human life for? What forms of inequality corrode the legitimacy of common life? What goods must remain insulated from optimization if freedom is not to collapse into managed preference?

These questions cannot be answered by datasets because datasets never contain their own standards of worth.

At this point, the political significance of the argument becomes sharper. If contemporary institutions rely ever more heavily on artificial reason while losing confidence in substantive judgment, they will tend to default toward whatever is administratively defensible, economically scalable, and statistically legible. This does not create tyranny in the classical sense. It creates something quieter and perhaps more durable: a civilization governed by plausible procedures that slowly forget why it exists. The issue is not that its systems are irrational. It is that their rationality has been narrowed to instrumental success within ends that remain unexamined, inherited, or silently captured by dominant interests.

A Capitalism of Meaning cannot accept this narrowing. It must insist that economic and technological systems remain answerable not only to efficiency and performance, but to a pu-

blicly arguable conception of the goods they are meant to serve. This does not require unanimity on metaphysical first principles. It requires something both less absolute and more demanding: the recovery of institutions capable of hosting substantive disagreement about ends without immediately reducing that disagreement to preference aggregation, ideological warfare, or technocratic closure. In such institutions, artificial reason would not disappear. It would be repositioned. It would serve as an instrument within judgment rather than a substitute for judgment.

This repositioning has direct implications for governance. It means that no model should be evaluated only by accuracy, no system only by throughput, no intervention only by efficiency gains. One must also ask how the model reshapes the moral relation between institution and person; how the system alters the visibility of responsibility; how the intervention changes the social meaning of being assessed, selected, refused, prioritized, or enhanced. A technically

successful system may still be politically corrosive if it empties decision of teleological seriousness. Conversely, a slower or more limited system may be normatively superior if it preserves goods that do not register well in optimization frameworks but are indispensable to trust and civic dignity.

This is also why the concept of meaningful human control, introduced in the previous chapter, must be understood teleologically as well as procedurally. Human control is meaningful not only when a human can intervene in the process, but when the intervention is guided by an intelligible conception of the human good that exceeds the model's own outputs. A decision-maker who merely checks whether the machine has run correctly is not exercising judgment in the full sense. Judgment begins where one is able to ask whether the criteria themselves are adequate to the good the institution is meant to protect. Without that capacity, human oversight becomes mechanical confirmation.

The philosophical issue can therefore be stated in simple terms. The crisis of the present is not that reason has become artificial. It is that societies increasingly expect artificial reason to carry burdens of normativity that only practical and political reason can bear. They ask systems to resolve questions that remain, inescapably, questions of ends: which vulnerabilities merit priority, which forms of life deserve protection, which inequalities are intolerable, which risks a community should collectively absorb, and what dignity requires when efficiency points elsewhere. The result is not that machines become moral. It is that humans grow evasive.

To resist this drift is not to reject intelligence, data, or even powerful forms of technical assistance. It is to recover the discipline of first-order judgment within conditions of unprecedented technical mediation. It is to remember that no society can outsource the question of what is good for human beings without eventually finding that someone else—market logic, bureaucratic habit, platform incentives, strategic com-

petition, or asymmetrical private power—has answered in its place.

The argument of this chapter thus prepares the terrain for what follows. If the algorithmic condition threatens to conceal sovereignty within infrastructure, and if artificial reason threatens to displace teleological seriousness with statistical normality, then the next question is how responsibility might be institutionally reconstituted. Under what conditions can human beings remain genuinely answerable within systems that constantly tempt them toward moral buffering, procedural refuge, and normative evasion? This brings us to a scarce good in contemporary governance: responsibility itself, not as retrospective blame, but as the preserved capacity to inhabit decision before it closes.

CHAPTER 6

RESPONSIBILITY AS A SCARCE GOOD: TOWARD MEANINGFUL HUMAN CONTROL

If the preceding chapters have shown anything, it is that the contemporary crisis cannot be understood solely in terms of distrust, resentment, technological opacity, or the philosophical eclipse of ends. Beneath all these phenomena lies a more elusive depletion: the erosion of responsibility as a lived and institutionally inhabitable form. Responsibility, in the strongest sense relevant to this book, is not reducible to blame after harm, nor to the formal allocation of liability within organizational charts, nor to the ritual language of accountability reports

and compliance frameworks. It names something prior and more demanding: the capacity of persons and institutions to remain present to the burden of decision before that decision hardens into procedure, output, or fate.

This capacity is becoming scarce. Not because contemporary societies are morally emptier than all previous ones, but because they increasingly generate environments in which the burden of deciding can be distributed, buffered, proceduralized, outsourced, or translated into forms that weaken the subjective and institutional experience of ownership. The result is not irresponsibility in the crude sense. Modern systems are full of responsibilities in the plural: roles, controls, duties, sign-offs, audits, risk committees, escalation matrices, legal safeguards, governance layers. Yet precisely within this hypertrophy of formal responsibility, responsibility in the singular often recedes. There are more positions charged with oversight, but fewer places in which someone fully inhabits the gravity of deciding.

This distinction is essential. A system may be densely organized in terms of formal competences and still be poor in responsibility. Indeed, complexity can facilitate moral diffusion. The more decisions are partitioned across functions, quantified through dashboards, routed through models, reviewed by committees, and enveloped in procedural legitimacy, the easier it becomes for each participant to experience his or her role as partial, derivative, or merely technical. No single step appears decisive; no single actor appears sovereign; no single moment seems to deserve the name of judgment. Yet the consequences accumulate all the same. Communities are displaced, workers are made redundant, citizens are flagged, treatments are denied, reputations are sorted, opportunities narrow, and futures are distributed. Responsibility evaporates not because nothing happened, but because too much happened through forms designed to make agency less experientially visible.

This is why responsibility must be treated as a scarce institutional good. Like trust, once eroded, it cannot be reconstituted simply through exhortation. It requires architecture. It requires settings in which decision can remain humanly traversable, where the question "who is prepared to stand behind this?" still has meaning before closure occurs, and where the answer is not automatically displaced into a chain of abstractions. Responsibility thus belongs not only to ethics but to institutional design. It is preserved or undermined by how processes are built, how knowledge circulates, how dissent is handled, how technical systems are embedded, and how asymmetries of consequence are made visible or concealed.

The prevailing governance cultures of advanced institutions often fail precisely here. They excel at documenting, escalating, controlling, and retrospectively evaluating. But they are far weaker at protecting what might be called the pre-decisional zone: the space in which the real normative weight of a choice can still be

encountered before it is translated into operational necessity. Once a decision has been framed as inevitable, benchmarked as efficient, coded into a system, or routed into a formal process, the moral energy required to reopen it rises dramatically. Responsibility is therefore most vulnerable not at the moment of scandal, when scrutiny is external and blame is active, but before the choice becomes final—when the organization is still telling itself that it is only refining procedures, adopting tools, managing risk, or following strategy.

It is in this pre-decisional zone that meaningful human control must be located. The phrase has become common in policy and regulatory documents, especially those concerning high-risk AI, automated decision-making, and safety-critical systems. Yet in many uses it remains conceptually impoverished. It is often interpreted as a technical condition: a human monitors the system, reviews outputs, retains override authority, or validates deployment. These measures may be necessary, but they are far from

sufficient. Human control is not meaningful simply because a human is physically or organizationally somewhere in the loop. It becomes meaningful only when a human or institution remains capable of inhabiting the normative burden of the decision rather than merely confirming the proper functioning of the machinery.

This difference may appear subtle, but it is fundamental. Consider the contrast between supervision and judgment. Supervision checks whether a process conforms to expectations. Judgment asks whether the expectations themselves are adequate to the good at stake. Supervision observes outputs. Judgment interrogates criteria. Supervision may ensure that a model was applied correctly. Judgment asks whether the model should have governed the case at all, whether the proxies it uses are legitimate, whether the harms it normalizes are politically defensible, and whether the institution remains recognizable to those subjected to its decisions. Meaningful human control, if it is to deserve

the name, must include this second dimension. Otherwise, the human actor becomes merely the final gasket in a machine whose moral logic has already been settled elsewhere.

From this perspective, responsibility is inseparable from interruption. A responsible order is not one in which decisions flow frictionlessly from data to model to output to implementation. It is one in which there remain authorized and institutionally protected points at which the flow can be slowed, challenged, reframed, or even refused. Interruption is not inefficiency in the pejorative sense. It is the form through which judgment resists premature closure. It is the sign that the system still knows that not every consequential choice can be reduced to execution without remainder.

The difficulty, of course, is that contemporary organizations are built to minimize interruption. They reward speed, consistency, scalability, auditability, throughput, and risk reduction. Even where they proclaim the importance of ethics, they often do so in languages subordina-

ted to implementation cycles and performance metrics. Under such conditions, responsibility tends to be tolerated only when it does not obstruct flow. But genuine responsibility often does obstruct flow. It asks unwelcome questions, reopens settled framings, makes invisible costs visible, resists optimization where the good cannot be adequately parameterized, and insists on exposing asymmetries that organizational narratives would prefer to naturalize. For this reason, responsibility is not merely administratively inconvenient. It is structurally counter-frictional. It must therefore be deliberately protected, or the system will steadily expel it as noise.

This is one reason why the architecture proposed in this book places so much emphasis on threshold spaces. A threshold space is not simply another committee, compliance layer, or ethics board. It is a site in which the transition from possibility to decision is held open long enough for the institutional and human stakes of that decision to be made visible. Such a space

is neither fully inside the chain of command nor fully outside it. It does not replace the decision-maker, nor does it offer external moral commentary after the fact. It operates in the interval where judgment can still encounter what procedure is about to close. In earlier work, this space has been described in terms of thirdness: a structured zone of mediation that interrupts the direct fusion of technical process and decisional closure.

The necessity of such spaces becomes especially clear in complex organizations where no single actor naturally holds a complete view of consequences. In large firms, public agencies, hospitals, universities, platform companies, and strategic infrastructures, knowledge is fragmented by specialization. Technical teams understand system capability but not territorial effect. Legal teams understand liability but not lived legitimacy. Operational teams understand throughput but not symbolic injury. Executives understand strategy but not always the fine-grained civic experience of those on whom

strategy falls. Under these conditions, responsibility cannot be preserved by goodwill alone. It requires institutional forms that recombine fragmented knowledges before they are translated into irreversible action.

This recombination is not merely epistemic. It is moral and political. To know more is not automatically to become more responsible. One may have excellent data and still remain buffered from the significance of what one knows. What matters is the formation of contexts in which knowledge is forced into relation with consequence. Responsibility grows where institutions require actors to confront the human meaning of their abstractions. It declines where actors are allowed to remain excellent within narrowed domains while treating broader effects as external or someone else's task.

At this point, one can better understand why responsibility must not be confused with veto power. To preserve responsibility does not mean granting any one ethical office or reflective body the authority to block action at will.

That would create paralysis, resentment, and institutional confusion. The aim is not to establish a sovereign moral censor inside organizations. It is to preserve the conditions under which difficult choices remain publicly and internally intelligible before they are finalized. Responsibility is not the power never to decide. It is the discipline of deciding without evading the meaning of what is decided.

This has important implications for leadership. Contemporary organizations often conflate leadership with decisiveness understood as velocity, clarity of command, and executional certainty. But where decisions carry large systemic, social, or technological consequences, the highest form of leadership may not lie in accelerating closure but in sustaining the difficult interval during which closure is still open to interrogation. This requires courage of a different kind: not only the courage to act, but the courage not to hide action behind inevitability; the courage to hear that a technically elegant path may still be normatively corrosive; the courage

to allow internal asymmetries, territorial costs, and long-term legitimacy questions to enter deliberation without immediately reducing them to communication problems.

One might therefore say that responsibility in advanced governance has two enemies. The first is arbitrariness: the unstructured exercise of will unconstrained by process, evidence, or law. Modern institutions have rightly built strong defenses against this. The second enemy, however, is more hidden: the disappearance of judgment into procedure. Against the first, law and process are indispensable. Against the second, they are not enough. Indeed, when process becomes too complete, it can serve as the vehicle of disappearance. The task is to inhabit the narrow and difficult corridor between arbitrary decision and depersonalized closure.

This corridor is where meaningful human control truly belongs. It is not a decorative human signature appended to automated systems, nor a token possibility of override retained for legal reassurance. It is the institutional preser-

vation of spaces in which technical mediation does not extinguish practical judgment. A meaningful human controller is not merely someone who can stop a system. It is someone—or some institutional configuration—capable of understanding why stopping, reframing, or qualifying the system might be demanded by the good the institution exists to serve.

Such configurations require specific safeguards. They require protected channels for dissent that are not immediately interpreted as disloyalty or inefficiency. They require the circulation of information across domains that would otherwise remain siloed. They require documentation not only of outputs but of decisional framing: why this system, for this domain, under these assumptions, with these accepted trade-offs? They require temporal protections: enough time for reflection before deployment in domains where closure will later be hard to reverse. They require narrative protections: the institutional ability to describe difficult choices in terms richer than cost, com-

pliance, or optimization. Above all, they require a culture in which asking whether a decision is politically and humanly bearable is treated as part of competence rather than as sentimentality.

At this stage, the relation between responsibility and trust also becomes clearer. Trust does not grow because institutions claim to care. It grows when subjects can reasonably believe that someone within the institution has remained exposed to the burden of deciding rather than merely protected by process. This does not mean trust depends on agreement with outcomes. Institutions may take painful, contested, and even tragic decisions and still preserve legitimacy if those affected experience that the institution did not hide from the cost, did not naturalize sacrifice, and did not treat the burden as invisible collateral. Responsibility, in this sense, is one of the few remaining sources of legitimacy available to systems too complex to promise universal satisfaction.

The stakes become even higher in contexts shaped by artificial intelligence and predictive systems. Where technical tools already nudge organizations toward closure, the institutional protection of responsibility becomes both more difficult and more urgent. If no one holds open the space between output and implementation, then meaningful human control collapses into fiction. The machine will not have replaced the human. Something more insidious will have happened: the human will still be present, but in a form no longer required to assume the full dignity and weight of judgment.

This is why responsibility, as the book understands it, is not simply a moral virtue but an infrastructural requirement of freedom. A society in which no one is prepared—or institutionally enabled—to inhabit the burden of decision will drift toward two equally dangerous poles: cynical proceduralism and charismatic compensation. In the first, systems continue to function while answerability becomes spectral. In the second, publics deprived of credible institutions

invest hope in figures who promise to decide without mediation. The only durable alternative is to build forms in which decision remains neither arbitrary nor hidden, neither purely personal nor purely systemic, but answerably composed.

A Capitalism of Meaning must therefore elevate responsibility from a derivative concern to a central criterion of institutional rationality. An order is not rational simply because it optimizes efficiently, documents extensively, or scales without friction. It is rational insofar as it preserves the human and political capacity to stand behind consequential choice. It must cultivate organizations in which responsibility is not washed away by complexity but thickened by design; in which leadership is measured not only by execution but by exposure to the meaning of what is executed; and in which technological power is never permitted to become a sanctuary from judgment.

The argument of this chapter, then, is both diagnostic and constructive. Diagnostic, becau-

se it identifies the depletion of responsibility as one of the most serious yet least visible pathologies of contemporary governance. Constructive, because it suggests that the answer lies not in rejecting process or technology, but in institutionally protecting the pre-decisional spaces where judgment can still occur in full view of consequence. This is the first step toward a governance model in which the human does not disappear behind the system, but remains present as the bearer of a burden no machine, however sophisticated, can morally absorb.

Once responsibility is understood in this stronger sense, the path opens toward the next task. If contemporary institutions need spaces that preserve judgment before closure, what larger economic and political tradition might support such a reconstruction? What resources exist, beyond the exhausted vocabulary of managerial liberalism and beyond the selective exit fantasies of the technoright, for imagining a form of common life in which freedom and social bond are not enemies? To answer that, one

must move from governance to genealogy—from the contemporary scarcity of responsibility to an older, largely forgotten language of public happiness, mutual aid, and civil economy.

CHAPTER 7

THE OTHER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: GENOVESI AND PUBLIC HAPPINESS

Every serious attempt to reconstruct an order in which freedom and social cohesion do not cancel one another must, at some point, confront a genealogical question. Is the link between market society and the erosion of common life inevitable? Must economic dynamism always tend toward social thinning, symbolic abstraction, and the gradual replacement of civic bonds with contractual surfaces? Or have there existed within the modern tradition alternative ways of conceiving economic life—ways in which exchange, prosperity, and initiative were never severed from mutuality, trust, and

the moral conditions of coexistence? The answer matters because without genealogy every proposal for renewal risks appearing either utopian or merely reactive. It is not enough to say that the present order is exhausted; one must also show that modernity itself contains interrupted possibilities not yet fully spent.

It is here that Antonio Genovesi becomes decisive. He stands for another eighteenth century: not the century of possessive individualism alone, not the century of market abstraction in its most unilateral interpretation, but the century in which political economy could still be conceived as a science of civil life rather than a mere calculus of private advantage. To return to Genovesi is not to indulge in Italian antiquarianism. It is to recover a line of thought in which commerce, trust, reciprocity, and public happiness belonged to a single horizon. In that horizon, the economy was not an autonomous machine whose excesses had to be morally corrected from outside. It was already an intrinsically civil activity, dependent upon the virtues, ex-

pectations, and forms of mutual recognition that make exchange socially inhabitable.

This difference is profound. In much of the dominant modern imagination, the market appears as a sphere that functions best when stripped of thick moral content. Social cooperation is presumed to arise from the aggregation of private interests coordinated by price, law, and competition. Trust appears as useful lubricant, not constitutive substance. The common good is then treated either as an unintended by-product of decentralized interaction or as a task for the State to repair after the fact. Genovesi's perspective disrupts this partition. He sees that economic life is neither morally self-sufficient nor simply in need of later compensation. It is civil through and through. It depends on confidence, custom, credibility, education, and the reciprocal recognition of persons whose interactions cannot be reduced to isolated utility-maximizers without damaging the very basis of prosperity.

In this sense, Genovesi offers something more radical than benevolence. He offers an anthropology. Human beings, in his account, are not sovereign monads who enter society reluctantly for reasons of prudence. They are relational beings whose flourishing is inseparable from forms of mutual assistance, esteem, and sociality. Commerce, therefore, cannot be understood only as the movement of goods; it is also a school of coexistence, for good or ill. It can cultivate habits of trust and reciprocal dependence, or it can degenerate into forms of extraction that consume the moral capital on which it relies. Wealth, in such a framework, is not simply accumulation. It is bound to the health of the civil body.

This anthropological premise is of enormous significance for the argument of this book. The Capitalism of Meaning rejects the view that social sustainability is an ornamental supplement to economic order. But this rejection would remain vulnerable if it appeared merely as a contemporary moral correction imposed upon an

otherwise neutral system. Genovesi allows a different move. He makes it possible to argue that economic life always already presupposes the social bond. Trust, cohesion, and civic intelligibility are not external constraints applied after the market has done its work. They are among the preconditions of a market order capable of enduring without devouring its own foundations.

One can therefore say that Genovesi's language of public happiness offers an anticipatory answer to the crises diagnosed in the earlier chapters. Against resentment, it offers a conception of prosperity inseparable from reciprocal recognition. Against technolibertarian exit, it offers a picture of freedom fulfilled within the civil body rather than against it. Against mimetic destabilization, it suggests that social life requires institutions capable of ordering aspiration within a framework of common benefit. Against algorithmic closure and the thinning of responsibility, it recalls that economic rationali-

ty cannot be severed from the moral and political meaning of the relations it organizes.

Public happiness, as Genovesi conceives it, should not be misunderstood as sentimental optimism or vague collective well-being. It is a serious civil category. It names the condition in which the prosperity of the community and the flourishing of its members are sufficiently connected that economic advancement does not systematically produce civic disintegration. It indicates that wealth cannot be judged only by its aggregate amount, but by the way in which it sustains or corrodes the social fabric through which it becomes meaningful. In this sense, public happiness stands in sharp contrast both to statist paternalism and to atomized individualism. It is neither the absorption of persons into a collective whole nor the reduction of society to a marketplace of self-regarding actors. It is the difficult balance in which personal initiative, mutual dependence, and civic order reinforce one another.

This balance is easily lost in later modernity because the language of economics gradually sheds its civic density. As the market comes to be imagined as an autonomous coordinating mechanism, the institutions and virtues that support it become less visible. Social trust is treated as background. Mutual aid is pushed toward charity or family life. Public institutions are assigned a compensatory role downstream from market outcomes. The result is a conceptual split whose consequences are immense. Economic efficiency is discussed in one register; social cohesion in another. Innovation belongs to one discourse; legitimacy to another. Profit is measured with precision; symbolic damage is noticed only when it erupts politically. A civilization organized in this way begins to treat as externalities precisely those conditions that make durable prosperity possible.

This is why the recovery of civil economy matters so much. It does not mean rejecting the productivity of markets, the discipline of enterprise, or the value of competition. It means re-

fusing the fiction that these can be organized independently of the civil body on which they feed. The social bond is not the residue left after rational actors have completed their exchanges. It is part of the generative medium within which such exchanges become possible in the first place. Where that bond erodes, contracts proliferate but confidence weakens; transactions continue but legitimacy thins; wealth may still be generated, but it is increasingly accompanied by resentment, symbolic estrangement, and the loss of common horizon.

Seen from this angle, Genovesi's thought acquires striking contemporary relevance. We inhabit economies of immense technical sophistication, yet their ability to sustain public happiness appears increasingly fragile. Growth may return without security. Innovation may accelerate without recognition. Opportunities may expand for some while the common world becomes more brittle for many. The result is a society in which private gains and collective confidence drift apart. This dissociation is one of

the defining pathologies of the present. It is precisely what a civil economy seeks to prevent.

At this point, the relation to the theme of responsibility becomes clearer. If economic life is intrinsically civil, then responsibility cannot be confined to legal compliance or post hoc compensation. Economic actors participate, whether they admit it or not, in shaping the conditions of trust, temporality, territorial continuity, and mutual recognition through which public happiness either persists or erodes. This does not mean burdening every enterprise with unlimited moral duties. It means recognizing that large-scale economic decisions have civil consequences that cannot be treated as politically neutral simply because they are commercially rational. The language of public happiness therefore anticipates, in older terms, the contemporary need to internalize systemic social costs rather than expel them into the civic background.

One might object that such language belongs to a world too distant from ours to provide

practical guidance. Genovesi wrote in a period before industrial capitalism, before platform infrastructures, before global finance, before machine learning, before biotechnological asymmetries. How can his categories orient a world shaped by data extraction, predictive systems, planetary supply chains, and strategic technological rivalry? The objection is serious, but it misunderstands the level at which genealogy operates. One does not return to Genovesi for ready-made policy instruments. One returns to him to recover an underlying grammar: the idea that the economy is always already embedded in relations of reciprocity and public life, and that a society cannot indefinitely separate wealth creation from the civic conditions of its legitimacy.

That grammar is precisely what has been lost in much contemporary discourse. Today, when market systems generate dislocation, one often hears only two kinds of response. The first says: this is the cost of efficiency, adaptation, innovation, and global competition. The second says:

the State must intervene afterwards with transfers, training, subsidies, or targeted relief. Both responses presuppose the same underlying split. They differ only over how severe the repair should be. Genovesi points toward something prior: an economy conceived from the outset in relation to public happiness, so that the civil consequences of transformation are not treated as accidental leftovers but as intrinsic criteria of judgment.

This insight opens directly onto the problem that later chapters will develop through the concept of the Systemic Social Dividend. If public happiness is a civil measure of economic order, then one needs institutions capable of preserving that measure under conditions of intense transformation. It is not enough to hope that markets will spontaneously generate broad-based cohesion, nor to rely on ad hoc public rescue when they do not. A mature political economy must build mechanisms through which the gains of transformation are linked back to the maintenance and regeneration of the social

body. Here the distance between Genovesi and the present narrows considerably. His anthropology and civil vocabulary prepare the normative terrain for institutional innovations our age urgently requires.

The contrast with the modern ideology of the sovereign individual is especially illuminating. In that ideology, freedom is imagined primarily as insulation: autonomy from dependence, maximal control over one's assets, one's data, one's opportunities, one's exit options. Social bonds appear as constraints unless voluntarily chosen. Public institutions appear as drag unless they can be instrumentally used. By contrast, the civil-economy tradition suggests that freedom matures within structures of reciprocal support that make initiative socially generative rather than socially corrosive. The person is not diminished by mutual aid; the person is made capable by it. To receive and to contribute are not signs of weakness but moments within a thicker understanding of social life.

This point is crucial because one of the deepest confusions of the present consists in treating dependence as failure. In reality, every advanced society depends on webs of care, infrastructure, trust, inheritance, law, territory, education, and shared temporal stability far denser than its dominant rhetoric admits. The myth of pure self-authorship survives only because these supports are backgrounded. Genovesi helps bring them back into view. He reminds us that a civilization built entirely around the denial of mutual dependence will end by consuming the invisible conditions that make freedom itself possible.

One can therefore read public happiness as an early antidote to the pathologies of both neoliberal abstraction and technolibertarian secession. It says, in effect, that no economic order deserves durability if it cannot secure a degree of common flourishing sufficient to bind initiative back to the civic whole. This is not collectivism. It is civil realism. It recognizes that wealth generated in a socially disintegrating order will

increasingly lose its political legitimacy, and that any system unable to convert productivity into public confidence will eventually govern through resentment, surveillance, or emergency compensation rather than shared purpose.

In recovering this tradition, one must also avoid a naïve harmonism. Civil economy does not imply that interests naturally align, that markets are gentle by nature, or that conflict can be morally dissolved. Genovesi's relevance lies not in denying antagonism, but in refusing to define the economic field exclusively through antagonism. He preserves a language in which cooperation is not a sentimental afterthought but a constitutive dimension of social wealth. This matters because contemporary systems often know how to model competition with extraordinary sophistication while lacking serious institutional languages for cooperation beyond contractual efficiency. Public happiness names a level of common benefit that cannot be exhausted by bilateral exchange.

At the same time, one must note that public happiness is not measurable in any simple technocratic sense. This is both a challenge and a strength. It resists reduction to GDP, throughput, productivity curves, or platform growth metrics. It forces us to ask whether a society can still narrate its prosperity as something broadly shareable, whether advancement remains compatible with trust, and whether the institutions of economic life still contribute to a world that citizens experience as theirs. In this way, the Genovesian horizon intersects with the broader argument of this book: the demand that systems become not merely productive, but intelligible and bearable to those who inhabit them.

This demand also has territorial significance. Public happiness is never purely abstract. It is lived in places, institutions, professions, rhythms of life, family structures, local expectations, and civic memories. One of the tragedies of the contemporary order is that economic transformations are often narrated at the scale of macroeconomic efficiency while their costs

are endured territorially. Entire regions can be optimized out of strategic relevance while aggregate indicators improve. Public happiness, by contrast, forces attention back to the social and territorial body in which prosperity must be rooted if it is to remain politically sustainable.

A Capitalism of Meaning therefore finds in Genovesi not a decorative precursor, but a foundational ally. He helps recover the truth that economic life cannot be severed from the civil conditions that allow it to command trust. He offers a grammar in which wealth and mutual aid, initiative and reciprocity, freedom and social bond can still appear as mutually implicating rather than mutually hostile. And he reminds us that any system which persistently treats public happiness as external to economic rationality will, sooner or later, face the return of the excluded element in the form of distrust, resentment, and political decomposition.

The chapter can therefore end with a sharpened proposition. The problem with the contem-

porary order is not simply that it creates winners and losers. Every dynamic system does that. The deeper problem is that it lacks a sufficiently robust civil grammar through which transformation can be related back to the happiness, dignity, and recognizability of the common world. Once that grammar is lost, prosperity becomes increasingly difficult to legitimate, and freedom increasingly difficult to universalize. The recovery of civil economy is thus not an exercise in nostalgia. It is part of the work of rebuilding the normative foundation on which new institutions of social sustainability can stand.

The next step is to move from genealogy to mechanism. If public happiness names the civil horizon that economic life must not destroy, what concrete forms can connect the wealth generated by common resources and systemic transformation back to the community itself? This question leads to one of the most suggestive examples in modern political economy: the Alaska model, and the broader problem of how

common wealth might be institutionally translated into a dividend capable of stabilizing freedom rather than abandoning it to chance.

CHAPTER 8

THE ALASKA MODEL AND THE RENT OF THE COMMONS: BEYOND BASIC INCOME

If the previous chapter recovered a civil grammar in which economic life is inseparable from public happiness, the present chapter asks the question that inevitably follows: through what institutional forms can that civil horizon be translated into a durable mechanism? Genealogy alone is not enough. It may restore conceptual depth, expose lost alternatives, and clarify what the contemporary order has forgotten. But without a mechanism capable of linking transformation back to the social body, even the most compelling civil vocabulary risks

remaining ethically suggestive yet politically weak. The problem of our time is not only to affirm that wealth presupposes a common world. It is to build institutions through which the gains of systemic transformation are visibly reconnected to that world.

At this threshold, the Alaska Permanent Fund becomes unusually instructive. Not because it offers a complete model for contemporary complexity, and certainly not because it can simply be copied across contexts, but because it embodies a principle of great importance: that the value extracted from a common resource may be institutionally recognized as belonging, at least in part, to the community as such. The significance of this principle is easy to underestimate. It breaks with the idea that wealth derived from structural endowments must either remain fully privatized or be mediated only through generalized taxation and discretionary redistribution. Instead, it creates a more direct connection between a shared source of value and a periodic social return.

The Alaskan case is, in one sense, materially specific. Oil revenues provide the underlying basis. But the political and philosophical relevance of the model lies elsewhere. It rests on the intuition that a community may hold a legitimate claim not only over the territory in which value is extracted, but over the institutional form through which that value is recognized as common wealth. This matters because it introduces a different grammar of belonging. The dividend is not charity. It is not means-tested relief. It is not a compensatory payment to the poor alone. It is the visible expression of a shared patrimony translated into regular civic form.

That visibility is decisive. A society organized entirely through opaque taxation and downstream spending may still redistribute. But it often does so in ways that feel administratively mediated rather than civilly recognized. The symbolic force of a dividend is different. It says that the community is not merely the passive background against which wealth is produced

and later managed by others. It says that the community is itself a bearer of entitlement grounded in the common conditions of value creation. This does not solve every problem of justice. But it reorders the political imagination. It makes it possible to think of citizens not only as taxpayers, beneficiaries, consumers, or labor-market participants, but as co-heirs to certain forms of collective wealth.

This shift is especially important today because advanced economies increasingly generate value through resources that are neither purely private nor easily legible within older categories of property. Data, infrastructural networks, territorial stability, social trust, environmental sinks, knowledge ecosystems, institutional reliability, and long-wave public investments all function as enabling conditions of accumulation. Yet the returns derived from these conditions are often captured asymmetrically, while the costs of their degradation are socialized diffusely. In such a world, the question raised by the Alaska model becomes newly urgent:

what counts as a common resource in the twenty-first century, and through what mechanisms can its rent be translated back into the social body?

To answer this, one must first resist a common confusion. The issue is not whether all wealth is common, nor whether private initiative should be dissolved into collective ownership. Such claims quickly become metaphysical or politically sterile. The point is more precise. Certain forms of value creation depend so deeply upon common preconditions—territorial, institutional, social, ecological, or informational—that a purely privatized appropriation of their returns becomes normatively unstable. It produces a growing dissociation between the architecture of production and the architecture of legitimacy. Wealth may continue to expand, but its claim to social recognition weakens, because too little of its source appears publicly acknowledged.

This is where the concept of rent becomes crucial. Rent, in the relevant sense, is not sim-

ply unearned income in the polemical everyday sense. It refers more technically to value derived from privileged access to scarce or structured advantages that are not reducible to one actor's effort alone. Classic natural-resource rents are the clearest example. But digital economies generate analogous patterns. Platform dominance may depend on network effects built upon mass participation. Data extraction depends upon the informational traces of millions of lives. Financial returns may presuppose public monetary order, legal enforceability, infrastructural continuity, and trust in institutions. Biotechnological breakthroughs may rely on public research ecosystems, regulatory credibility, patient populations, and shared biological data. None of this invalidates private innovation. It does, however, complicate the claim that resulting gains are normatively self-justifying in purely private terms.

Once this point is granted, the debate shifts. The question is no longer whether redistribution should occur only after inequality becomes

politically dangerous. The question becomes whether political economies can develop ex ante institutional channels through which the returns associated with common resources, systemic infrastructures, and socially generated advantages are visibly reintegrated into the community. This is a different problem from ordinary welfare policy, though it intersects with it. Welfare intervenes after need appears. A dividend rooted in common wealth expresses a prior principle: that the social body has a standing claim where value arises from conditions no private actor wholly created.

This distinction helps explain why the present chapter is titled beyond basic income. Universal basic income has attracted attention because it seems to offer a simple response to automation, precarity, and the weakening link between labor and livelihood. But despite its appeal, basic income often suffers from conceptual ambiguity. It can be defended on libertarian grounds as a way of replacing more complex welfare structures; on technocratic

grounds as an efficient transfer; on egalitarian grounds as unconditional support; on post-work grounds as emancipation from labor dependence. Each rationale leads in a different political direction. More importantly for our purposes, many versions of basic income remain weakly connected to the question of where the distributable value actually comes from. They answer the problem of income security without necessarily answering the problem of civic legitimacy.

A dividend grounded in common wealth differs in structure and meaning. It is not merely an amount paid to individuals because society has decided they need support. It is a civil and institutional acknowledgment that part of the value circulating through the system is rooted in shared conditions of production. This transforms the semantics of distribution. The citizen receives not a concession, but a recognition. The transfer is not framed primarily as relief, but as a return linked to membership in a political community whose common resources have

been activated economically. Such recognition matters because social orders are stabilized not only by material support but by the intelligibility of why support takes the form it does.

This does not mean that every dividend must be equal, unconditional in all circumstances, or independent of larger institutional design. The point is conceptual before it is technical. Once a community recognizes that common wealth generates claimable rent, the space opens for a plurality of distributive architectures. Some may take the form of universal direct payments. Others may combine partial dividends with territorial reinvestment, social infrastructure funds, educational endowments, or resilience mechanisms for communities disproportionately exposed to systemic transformation. The crucial issue is that the social body ceases to appear merely as an externality absorber and becomes once again a visible participant in the circuit of value.

At this stage, the relevance to the broader argument of the book becomes clearer. Earlier

chapters argued that contemporary systems consume trust, cohesion, and responsibility by treating the civil conditions of order as background variables rather than constitutive elements of legitimacy. The idea of a commonwealth dividend offers one possible institutional counter-movement. It acknowledges that the social basis of production cannot remain invisible if a civilization hopes to maintain public confidence under conditions of intense change. A dividend is, in this sense, one of the few mechanisms through which a system can say, in institutional form, that transformation has not entirely severed itself from the people, places, and shared infrastructures that made it possible.

The expansion of the question from oil to data is especially revealing. In digital societies, data are often described either as personal property or as a resource to be governed through privacy law. Both frameworks matter, but neither is sufficient. Data are not merely individual traces. At scale, they are generated through so-

cial existence, platform participation, public infrastructures, communicative ecologies, and shared informational environments. Their economic value often emerges only through aggregation, processing, and network effects that no single individual controls. This makes them unusually difficult to fit into classical property models. Yet it also makes them a paradigmatic case of common-conditioned value. If such value is systematically monetized without visible civic return, then the dissociation between accumulation and legitimacy widens further.

A Data Sovereign Fund, or some analogous institution, becomes thinkable at precisely this point. The idea would not be to abolish innovation, nor to nationalize information in crude form, nor to assign every data point a micro-property price. It would be to recognize that at least some part of the rent generated by large-scale informational extraction and coordination arises from common conditions and should therefore be institutionally recycled into the civil body. This could support direct social divi-

dends, digital public infrastructures, territorial regeneration, health access, educational endowments, or transition mechanisms in sectors destabilized by automation and platform concentration. The technical forms would vary. The principle would remain: common-conditioned wealth should not return to society only through opaque secondary channels if it can also be recognized through visible civic mechanisms.

The same logic applies more broadly to other domains of structural transformation. Environmental transitions generate new forms of rent through carbon markets, energy infrastructures, mineral access, and public subsidy regimes. AI systems generate gains through the capture of collective linguistic, visual, and behavioral traces, public research legacies, and vast infrastructural ecosystems. Financial systems derive value from legal order, liquidity backstops, and public credibility. In each case, the problem is not that private actors should earn nothing. It is that their gains are often intelligible only again-

st a common background whose contribution remains politically under-recognized.

This is where the idea of the Systemic Social Dividend begins to take shape more clearly. Unlike a simple resource dividend, it is not confined to one raw-material revenue stream. Nor is it reducible to a classic welfare transfer. It is conceived as a broader institutional response to the social costs and common preconditions of large-scale transformation. Its function is not merely to distribute money, but to stabilize legitimacy. It does so by creating a structured return from systemic gains to the social body in forms that are visible, durable, and linked to the preservation of trust, territorial continuity, and civic confidence.

To stabilize legitimacy is not a cosmetic goal. It is a constitutional-economic necessity in societies where transformation increasingly outruns mediation. When entire sectors are reorganized, when automation displaces labor, when platforms extract value from shared attention, when environmental adaptation de-

mands sacrifice, and when biotechnological innovation may eventually stratify the time of life itself, a purely market-distributive logic becomes politically explosive. If gains remain concentrated while losses are territorialized and future insecurity spreads, then resentment is not an anomaly. It is the logical social language of a system that has failed to convert innovation into shared horizon. A dividend, properly conceived, is one of the institutional means through which that conversion can be attempted.

Here one must also confront an important objection. Does the language of dividends risk encouraging passivity, dependence, or a politics of rentier citizenship? The concern is understandable. Any distributive instrument can be poorly designed. A dividend detached from participation, public meaning, or productive regeneration could indeed become politically thin. But this objection misses the stronger conception at stake here. The point is not to replace work, initiative, or enterprise with passive entitlement. It is to acknowledge that many contem-

porary transformations already generate forms of socialized cost and common-conditioned value that existing institutions fail to process adequately. A dividend does not negate agency. It seeks to protect the conditions under which agency remains socially legitimate and broadly distributed.

In this respect, a well-designed dividend should be thought of less as a substitute for social life than as one of its stabilizers. It can reduce the insecurity that makes transitions politically intolerable. It can make difficult collective decisions more bearable by visibly linking them to common return. It can support forms of risk-taking, education, family formation, retraining, territorial adaptation, and civic patience that purely individualized market exposure corrodes. It can also function symbolically, reminding citizens that they are not only burden-bearers in an economy of extraction, but recognized participants in a polity capable of institutional memory and return.

This symbolic function is not secondary. One of the gravest failures of contemporary political economy is that citizens often experience transformation only under the sign of adaptation. They are told to reskill, relocate, update, compete, comply, optimize, or endure. Rarely are they institutionally addressed as co-beneficiaries of the systemic gains whose social costs they help absorb. A dividend can alter this grammar. It says that transformation does not flow in one direction only. It returns. It leaves a trace of recognition. It acknowledges that common life is not just the terrain across which accumulation moves, but one of its rightful destinations.

The territorial dimension is again crucial. Dividends need not be conceived only as individual disbursements. In many cases, the more rational and legitimating design may combine direct payments with place-based reinvestment. This is especially true where the costs of transformation are concentrated geographically: deindustrialized regions, logistics corridors, ex-

traction zones, areas exposed to ecological transition, labor markets disrupted by automation, or communities structurally dependent on soon-to-be-reorganized sectors. If the social bond is territorial as well as individual, then civic return must sometimes take spatial form. Schools, healthcare systems, digital infrastructures, transport, public research institutions, and local regeneration funds may all function as embodiments of the same dividend principle.

One can therefore distinguish between a thin and a thick concept of the commons. A thin concept treats the commons merely as a set of resources whose depletion must be managed. A thick concept treats them as the civil and institutional substrate through which a polity sustains itself across time. The argument of this chapter belongs to the second tradition. What is at stake is not simply efficient resource governance. It is whether common-conditioned wealth can be institutionally translated into forms

that renew the recognizability of the common world itself.

This is why the Alaska model matters even where oil does not. It dramatizes a principle that many advanced societies have forgotten: that the community may claim not only protection from the harms of extraction but visible participation in the gains derived from shared endowments. In an era defined less by territorial oil wealth than by digital, infrastructural, ecological, and biopolitical transformations, that principle must be expanded rather than abandoned. The challenge is no longer to distribute the rent of a single natural resource. It is to rethink the rents generated by systemic modernity itself.

A Capitalism of Meaning requires exactly this move. It cannot be satisfied with redistributing hardship after legitimacy has already decayed. It must create mechanisms through which common wealth, common risk, and common exposure are institutionally reconnected. The dividend is one of the most promising of those me-

chanisms because it operates simultaneously on material and symbolic levels. It supports lives, territories, and transitions, but it also restores a missing sentence to political economy: what is generated from the common must, in visible part, return to the common.

The next step is to examine what happens when this principle is absent in situations of acute industrial dislocation. For abstract mechanisms acquire their real force only when tested against lived cases. It is one thing to argue that systemic gains should return to the social body. It is another to ask what becomes of persons, territories, and civic trust when transformation arrives without that return. This question leads us to a concrete and emblematic field of experience: the industrial trauma of closure, displacement, and failed reintegration—what might be called, in concentrated form, the lesson of Lear.

CHAPTER 9

THE LESSON OF LEAR: TRAUMA AS LABORATORY

The force of an idea is tested not only by its conceptual elegance, but by its ability to interpret situations in which social reality becomes concentrated, painful, and impossible to sentimentalize. Industrial closure is one of those situations. It condenses, within a limited territorial and human space, many of the decisive tensions of contemporary capitalism: the asymmetry between strategic rationality and lived consequence, the dissociation between aggregate efficiency and local devastation, the fragility of institutional mediation, the humiliation of populations told to interpret loss as necessity, and the corrosion of trust when transformation arrives without any visible grammar of return. It is

for this reason that the lesson of Lear matters. Not because it is the only relevant case, nor because its details exhaust a general theory, but because it serves as a laboratory in which the pathologies diagnosed in earlier chapters become starkly legible.

Every major closure, relocation, or industrial reorganization forces a question that political economy too often postpones: what exactly is being decided when a plant is shut, a production line moved, a workforce downsized, or a territory declared strategically obsolete? On one level, the answer seems obvious. A firm adapts to competition, cost pressures, technological change, global supply chains, shareholder expectations, or sectoral restructuring. The decision is framed as economic. Yet anyone who has observed the territorial aftermath of such events knows that this framing is radically incomplete. Much more is being decided than the allocation of capital. Rhythms of life are broken. Expectations of continuity collapse. Professional identities are dislocated. Family strategies

are unsettled. Local institutions lose anchors. Informal solidarities weaken. The symbolic status of work itself changes. And perhaps most importantly, a community receives a message about its place in the larger order: that it can be optimized away.

This message has enormous political significance. A territory that experiences closure without recognition does not only lose jobs. It loses intelligibility. Its members are asked to accept that something foundational has ended while the language surrounding that ending remains abstract, managerial, and strategic. Terms such as competitiveness, restructuring, efficiency, adaptation, and market necessity may all contain truth. But if they arrive without any visible effort to metabolize the civil consequences of the decision, they become instruments of symbolic injury. People are not wounded only by loss. They are wounded by being told that their loss belongs to a grammar in which they themselves are no longer fully legible as political subjects.

This is why trauma is the right word. Trauma is not simply severe damage. It is damage that cannot be adequately integrated into the meaning-structures available to those who suffer it. Industrial trauma occurs when a community is transformed in ways that exceed its institutional capacity to interpret, absorb, and recompose the shock. Jobs can sometimes be replaced; trust is harder to replace. Income may eventually recover in part; civic confidence often does not. A region may statistically adapt while carrying forward a sediment of humiliation, suspicion, and temporal dislocation that later becomes available to populism, withdrawal, or generalized distrust. The economic event passes. The civic wound remains.

It is in this sense that Lear—and with it many similar cases across Europe and beyond—should be read not only as a labor-market event, but as a test of civil architecture. What matters is not merely whether the decision was commercially rational. It may well have been. The question is whether the institutional order sur-

rounding the decision possessed any means of transforming private rationality into publicly bearable transition. Too often, the answer is no. Firms decide within strategic logics. States intervene unevenly, often late. Unions mobilize under asymmetrical conditions. Local authorities scramble for visibility. Workers and families are left navigating a mixture of promises, procedural uncertainty, media narratives, and partial compensation. Under such conditions, even when formal actors all behave within legal boundaries, the overall process can still produce what earlier chapters have called lawful but destructive outcomes.

This is exactly the point where the concept of the Systemic Social Dividend becomes more than abstract design. Industrial trauma reveals what happens in its absence. A major restructuring event produces immediate gains or protections for some actors—cost containment, market repositioning, strategic reallocation, shareholder reassurance, organizational flexibility—while diffusing long-wave costs into the territo-

rial and civic background. Those costs take multiple forms: lost employment, reduced local demand, stress on welfare systems, educational discontinuities, migration pressures, family instability, reputational decline of the area, and the slower but politically crucial erosion of faith that the system reciprocates contribution with recognition. When no institutional mechanism exists to register these losses as socially generated costs requiring structured return, the community is left with compensation fragments at best and symbolic abandonment at worst.

One must be precise here. Not every closure can or should be prevented. A serious political economy cannot deny technological change, sectoral transformation, or the need for firms to adapt. The question is not whether all disruption is illegitimate. The question is what kind of order permits disruption without converting it into civic decomposition. This is where the conventional opposition between market realism and social sentimentality becomes useless. A realistic order is not one that allows capital to

move while pretending that communities will somehow reabsorb the consequences on their own. Nor is it one that freezes every productive structure in place. It is one that recognizes transformation as politically and socially costly, and that therefore builds institutions able to convert strategic necessity into a process of visible return, reinvestment, and public re-legitimation.

The absence of such institutions generates a characteristic temporal injustice. Strategic decisions are often made in the short or medium term according to highly concentrated rationalities: firm survival, productivity, supply-chain optimization, sectoral repositioning. Their civic consequences, however, unfold over much longer durations. A locality may spend decades processing the afterlife of a closure. Children grow up in altered horizons. Young adults leave. Small businesses disappear. Public spaces thin out. Narratives of decline become self-confirming. Trust in institutions does not merely fall in the moment; it becomes inherited skepticism. This temporal asymmetry is one of the

most severe defects of contemporary capitalism. Those who decide are often insulated from the duration of the damage, while those who endure it are forced to inhabit its long tail.

The Lear case becomes exemplary insofar as it makes visible this disproportion between decision time and civic time. Even when negotiations occur, and even when formal compensation is discussed, the underlying logic remains too narrow if the community is still treated mainly as an aggregate of labor units rather than as a living civil body. Work is not only income. It is one of the great mediators between individual identity and shared world. To remove it abruptly, or to reorganize it without a grammar of continuity, is to do more than generate unemployment. It is to destabilize one of the forms through which persons understand their contribution, dignity, and future.

This is why retraining discourse, though important, is insufficient when offered in isolation. To tell workers or territories simply to reskill is often to repeat, at a lower intensity, the same ab-

straction that produced the wound. Skills matter. Mobility matters. New sectors matter. But the civil problem is larger. A community does not need only new competencies; it needs a believable path by which its past contribution is acknowledged, its present insecurity is materially buffered, and its future is rendered imaginable again. Without these elements, reskilling becomes less a bridge than a moralized instruction to adapt.

The deeper lesson is that industrial trauma is not only an economic failure or a policy gap. It is a crisis of mediation. The actors involved often speak in radically different temporal and normative languages. Firms speak the language of market strategy. Workers speak the language of livelihood and dignity. Local authorities speak the language of territorial continuity. National governments speak the language of macroeconomic balance and political management. The media often speak the language of event and spectacle. None of these languages is false. But where there is no institutional form

capable of composing them into a process of intelligible transition, they collide rather than converge. Trauma emerges in the space opened by their non-composition.

It is here that one sees why earlier chapters insisted so strongly on threshold spaces, responsibility, and the preservation of judgment before closure. In most industrial crises, the community encounters the decision only after the decisive logic has already hardened elsewhere. Consultation comes late. Negotiation is reactive. Territorial actors are invited to manage consequences rather than shape premises. By then, the social energy available is overwhelmingly defensive. What is missing is an architecture capable of bringing strategic rationality into relation with civic consequence before a closure becomes administratively inevitable.

This suggests a demanding but necessary proposition: a mature political economy should treat major restructuring events as moments of pre-political intensity requiring special institutions of translation and return. Not because

every decision can be democratized in the naïve sense, nor because firms can cease to decide strategically, but because the asymmetry between private decisional power and public territorial consequence has become too great to be managed through late-stage compensation alone. The social body must enter the process earlier and more structurally than it usually does.

The concept of trauma as laboratory names exactly this. In the laboratory, one does not simply observe pain; one learns from its structure. What does a closure teach? It teaches that the market does not process territorial time well. It teaches that legal compliance does not guarantee civic legitimacy. It teaches that compensation without recognition is thin, and recognition without material return is cynical. It teaches that institutions lacking mechanisms of reintegration will convert strategic change into long-duration distrust. And it teaches, perhaps above all, that the social costs of transformation are neither accidental nor residual. They are constitutive. The only question is whether the sy-

stem will continue to hide them or begin to institutionalize them.

This is where the Systemic Social Dividend re-enters not as theory, but as counterfactual. What would it mean for a closure event to occur within an order shaped by dividend logic? It would mean, first, that the gains associated with larger sectoral restructuring would not be allowed to separate entirely from the communities bearing the cost. Second, it would mean that visible, rule-based mechanisms of territorial return would activate not as charitable rescue, but as institutional recognition of common contribution and common exposure. Third, it would mean that transition would be conceived not merely as labor-market reallocation, but as civic re-composition: involving schools, health systems, local entrepreneurship, transport, digital infrastructure, family support, and long-horizon regional regeneration.

In such a framework, the aim would not be to "pay off" resentment. That would be too crude and ultimately self-defeating. The aim would

be to interrupt the conversion of economic shock into symbolic abandonment. A community can bear difficult decisions more readily when it perceives that the order imposing them still acknowledges its past contribution, still invests in its future, and still addresses it as part of a common project rather than as a disposable residue. The difference between loss and humiliation often lies exactly here.

It is also important to note that not all returns need take the same form. Direct income support may be essential in the immediate aftermath. But over time, the thicker dividend logic may require place-based regeneration: vocational institutions linked to future industries, health and mental-health services, social infrastructure, credit for local enterprise, new research nodes, transport renewal, environmental remediation, and civic spaces through which a territory can narrate itself again as a site of possibility rather than decline. Without such territorial forms, direct support alone may soften the blow without reversing the narrative of obsolescence.

The Lear lesson therefore extends well beyond one industrial case. It speaks to the broader condition of societies in which transformation is governed by narrow strategic rationalities while its consequences radiate through broad civic ecologies. Platformization, green transition, AI automation, logistics reorganization, supply-chain relocation, and future biotechnological stratification will all reproduce similar patterns unless new mechanisms are built. Some communities will be told they must decarbonize faster, others that they must automate or disappear, others that they must compete in globalized sectors with thinner labor protections, others that they must accept infrastructural or environmental burdens in the name of national strategy. In every case, the civil question returns: what makes such transformations politically bearable rather than merely administratively executable?

This is why trauma cannot remain a sociological afterthought. It must become a design principle. Institutions must be judged partly by

whether they know how to metabolize disruption without converting it into durable distrust. The point is not to eliminate pain from history. No serious order can promise that. The point is to ensure that pain is not distributed in ways that destroy the recognizability of the common world. A society that repeatedly asks certain places and classes to absorb the long tail of transformation while others capture the gains will eventually lose not only cohesion, but the legitimacy to demand sacrifice at all.

One might say, then, that the real lesson of industrial trauma is constitutional rather than sectoral. It concerns the basic terms under which a community accepts being governed through change. If change means only exposure, adaptation, and delayed residual aid, then legitimacy weakens and resentment hardens. If change is accompanied by visible return, territorial investment, civic recognition, and institutions of transition, then even difficult decisions may remain within the horizon of common life.

The difference between these two orders is not sentimental. It is structural.

A Capitalism of Meaning must therefore read cases like Lear as warning and instruction at once. Warning, because they reveal what happens when economic rationality is severed from civic repair. Instruction, because they show where mechanisms of reintegration must be located: not only in income support, but in the wider architecture through which communities remain intelligible to themselves after shock. An order that cannot do this will increasingly govern through emergency politics, anti-elite resentment, and episodic compensation. An order that learns from trauma, by contrast, can begin to convert disruption into a laboratory for institutional maturity.

This chapter has thus aimed to make one central point unavoidable. The problem with industrial trauma is not that capitalism changes the world. The problem is that it too often changes the world without preserving a visible path by which those who bear the cost can remain part

of the future being built. To restore that path is the real meaning of transition.

The next step is to leave, for a time, the industrial terrain and move toward the frontier where the civilizational stakes become even larger: biotechnology, mortality, and the politics of long life. For if industrial closures show what happens when work is reorganized without civic return, the coming age of longevity may show what happens when life itself becomes differentially governable without a new architecture of justice.

CHAPTER 10

AGAINST EDENISM: WHY DEATH IS NOT MERELY NATURAL

If the previous chapter examined what happens when economic transformation strikes work, territory, and civic continuity without a visible architecture of return, the present chapter moves toward a frontier that is at once older and newer than industrial conflict: mortality itself. This shift is not arbitrary. For much of modern politics, the central distributive questions concerned property, labor, welfare, education, and rights within the span of an assumed human life-course. Today, however, the horizon is changing. Biotechnology, genomic medicine, regenerative therapies, computatio-

nal biology, large-scale health data, and the convergence of artificial intelligence with the life sciences are beginning to alter not merely the treatment of disease, but the political imagination of aging, frailty, and the duration of life. Under these conditions, mortality can no longer be treated only as a metaphysical given or a medical endpoint. It is increasingly becoming a civilizational variable.

This is why the problem of "Edenism," in the sense made provocative by Peter Thiel, deserves serious attention. The term points polemically to the belief that the state of nature—poverty, illness, biological decay, and early death—should be accepted as though it were normatively authoritative simply because it is old, familiar, or "natural." Against this, the anti-Edenist impulse insists that much human suffering has never been sacred in itself, and that technical power should not be morally inhibited by a romanticization of limitation. There is truth in this challenge. Modern civilization has already been built, in part, on the refusal to treat plague,

famine, infant mortality, and preventable suffering as inviolable aspects of the human condition. Sanitation, antibiotics, vaccination, surgery, anesthesia, and public health all emerged from the practical conviction that what is given is not therefore justified.

The difficulty lies in what follows from this conviction once biotechnology begins not merely to cure discrete illnesses but to reconfigure the temporal architecture of human life. To say that mortality should not be romanticized is not yet to say how the struggle against it ought to be governed. Nor does it tell us under what conditions efforts to delay aging, prevent decline, extend healthy lifespan, or selectively manage biological vulnerability can remain compatible with civic equality. The danger, then, is double. On one side lies a residual moralism that sacralizes limitation and treats technical ambition with suspicion simply because it reaches into domains once reserved to fate. On the other side lies a libertarian or oligarchic biopolitics in which the extension of life becomes a frontier

of asymmetrical advantage, privately pursued and selectively distributed. The challenge of our century will be to reject both.

This challenge matters because the old opposition between nature and technology is no longer sufficient. Nature is not neutral simply because it precedes us. Nor is technology emancipatory simply because it transforms what precedes us. A society serious about justice cannot treat biological givenness as normatively self-vindicating, but neither can it allow the technical contestation of that givenness to unfold under conditions of radical inequality without confronting the political consequences. The question is no longer whether mortality, decline, and disease should be resisted where possible. The question is under what social architecture that resistance occurs.

At this point, it becomes necessary to state something that much contemporary discourse prefers to avoid: death is not merely natural in any politically innocent sense. It is, of course, biologically rooted. But within human societies,

mortality is always already socially distributed, institutionally mediated, economically stratified, and symbolically interpreted. Entire populations live longer than others not because biology alone has favored them, but because healthcare access, nutrition, environmental exposure, labor conditions, territorial inequality, stress, violence, and institutional quality have already made life expectancy a political fact. The notion that death is simply natural becomes untenable the moment one examines the actual social distribution of premature mortality. Some die sooner because the order has silently decided that they will.

This point is essential because it reveals that biopolitics has never been absent from modernity. States have long governed health, reproduction, sanitation, contagion, survival, and demographic continuity. Economies have long allocated exposure to illness and risk unevenly. The novelty of the present lies not in the emergence of life as a political issue, but in the increasing plausibility that life-extension itself

may become a major axis of inequality. We may be approaching a world in which some subjects do not merely live better within a fixed biological frame, but live substantially longer within a frame that is itself becoming technically malleable. When that horizon becomes credible, the classical language of equality begins to tremble.

To see why, one need only recall how much of political modernity presupposed a rough commonality of mortal horizon. Citizens differed in rank, wealth, education, and power, but they remained, in some broad sense, subject to the same final temporal condition. That commonality was always imperfect, often brutally so. Yet it still anchored the intuition that political membership unfolded within a shared human span. If biotechnology begins to stratify not only life chances but the length and quality of life itself, then inequality crosses a threshold. It no longer concerns merely what one can possess, consume, or influence during a common lifetime. It concerns the differential distribution of time as such.

This prospect changes the moral meaning of technical progress. The question is no longer only whether a treatment works or whether an intervention can be safely deployed. It is whether a society can remain recognizably common if access to biological extension becomes increasingly selective. A world in which elites can defer decline, optimize longevity, or purchase significantly thicker futures than ordinary citizens is not simply more unequal. It is governed by a different temporal anthropology. Some inhabit expandable life; others inhabit disposable time. Under such conditions, political rhetoric about equal dignity risks becoming hollow unless institutions are developed that can prevent the temporal divide from hardening into a new civilizational caste structure.

This is where the critique of Edenism must itself be deepened. It is not enough to say that nature should not be fetishized. One must also ask what kind of society is implied by the refusal to fetishize it. If anti-Edenism simply licenses the strongest actors to use wealth and inno-

vation to insulate themselves from fragility more effectively than others, then it does not liberate humanity from the cruelty of nature. It privatizes the struggle against nature and turns mortality into the most radical of positional goods. The issue then is not merely that some will have more. It is that some will possess more future.

To understand the gravity of this, one must think temporally rather than only economically. Unequal income distributes comfort, security, and opportunity unevenly within time. Unequal longevity distributes time itself unevenly. This is a far deeper fissure. It means that the old social differences in education, influence, and wealth can compound across significantly divergent life trajectories. If the wealthy and technologically connected begin to enjoy not merely healthier but markedly longer lives, they do not simply retain privilege. They accumulate more years in which privilege can reproduce itself. The biological horizon becomes a multiplier of social hierarchy.

This is why the politics of long life cannot be left to market logic alone. Markets are highly effective at allocating scarce goods according to willingness and ability to pay. But when the goods in question concern not luxury consumption but the extension of healthy human time, the moral and political stakes become incomparable. A society that leaves such matters entirely to private purchasing power implicitly accepts that some lives are worth more future than others. It may not say so explicitly. It may frame the matter as innovation incentive, price discovery, or consumer choice. But the underlying political meaning remains: biological possibility will be stratified according to asymmetrical means.

At the same time, one must avoid the inverse simplification according to which any extension of life under unequal conditions is necessarily illegitimate. The first task is not prohibition. It is orientation. A mature political order does not answer every new power by banning it, nor every new inequality by pretending the power

should not exist. It asks instead whether the institutions capable of governing that power justly are being built quickly enough to match the trajectory of innovation. The real scandal of many contemporary systems is not innovation itself, but the lag between what can be done and what can be legitimized.

This lag is especially dangerous because biotechnological innovation tends to be framed in highly individualized terms. Health optimization, preventive medicine, longevity therapeutics, and genomic personalization are often narrated as matters of personal choice, lifestyle, and self-enhancement. But the social meaning of these technologies is far broader. They may alter pension systems, intergenerational contracts, labor markets, inheritance structures, educational rhythms, urban design, healthcare expenditure, and demographic politics. More profoundly still, they may alter the emotional and institutional grammar through which societies imagine life stages, obligation, maturity, dependency, and death itself. What begins as a

medical innovation can become a new constitution of time.

This is where the argument of the previous chapters becomes indispensable. A society capable of metabolizing such transformations will require more than regulatory checklists or bioethical committees issuing generalized principles. It will require institutions able to connect technical possibility to public meaning, strategic innovation to common legitimacy, and private gain to social return. The issue is not simply safety, though safety matters. It is whether the social basis of life-extension is recognized as common enough to justify common claims upon its benefits and common limits upon its asymmetrical capture.

One may therefore say that the anti-Edenist impulse is politically valid only under certain conditions. It is valid when it refuses fatalism without collapsing into oligarchic escape. It is valid when it treats the fight against preventable suffering as a civilizational task rather than a luxury frontier for the already advantaged. It is

valid when it recognizes that the extension of life, once technically plausible, becomes part of the public question of justice rather than a purely private matter of consumption. And it is valid when it refuses both romantic surrender to nature and arrogant indifference to the social architecture through which technical conquest will be distributed.

The deeper philosophical issue concerns finitude. Human societies have always organized meaning partly around limits—birth, aging, illness, dependence, death. To challenge some of these limits technically is not automatically to destroy meaning. But it does transform the field in which meaning must be sought. A civilization unable to think normatively about this transformation will fall into one of two bad metaphysics: either a nostalgic humanism that mistakes fragility for virtue, or a marketized transhumanism that mistakes power over fragility for justice. Neither is adequate. The first capitulates too quickly to suffering; the second treats

suffering's overcoming as if the distribution of that overcoming were politically irrelevant.

A Capitalism of Meaning must articulate a different path. It must hold together the legitimacy of technical ambition and the primacy of civic equality. It must refuse to sanctify early death or preventable decline, yet equally refuse a world in which biological time becomes the most privatized of assets. It must insist that the governance of life-extension technologies cannot be postponed until after market asymmetries have already become entrenched. And it must recognize that the common conditions of biomedical innovation—public research, shared biological data, health infrastructures, trust in institutions, patient populations, and intergenerational solidarity—create corresponding claims of common return.

Here the analogy with earlier chapters becomes stronger. Just as industrial transformation requires mechanisms of territorial and social reintegration, and just as digital value extraction calls for forms of common return, so too

biotechnological transformation will require institutions that prevent life-extension from functioning purely as a rent of privileged access. The future struggle over longevity will not be won by moral outrage alone. It will require economic, legal, and institutional architectures capable of socializing at least part of the benefits generated by common scientific and biological infrastructures.

This is why the chapter's central claim can now be stated more plainly. Death is not merely natural because the temporal horizon within which human beings live and die is already shaped by institutions, resources, environments, and power. Once technical systems begin to intervene more deeply in that horizon, the question of mortality ceases to belong only to medicine or metaphysics. It becomes part of political economy. It becomes a question of which lives are granted thicker futures, under what rules, and with what effect on the recognizability of a shared world.

The anti-Edenist provocation, then, should be preserved—but purified. Preserved, because no humane civilization should romanticize preventable suffering. Purified, because the rejection of fatalism must not be captured by a politics of selective biological privilege. The struggle against decline must become a common question if it is not to become a new engine of stratification. That is the true criterion. Not whether death can in some respects be delayed, but whether the social meaning of that delay remains compatible with common citizenship.

Once this is admitted, the next question comes into view with full force. If mortality and life-extension are becoming political variables, can access to healthy longevity still be treated as a secondary issue within social justice, or must it begin to be understood as a new dimension of citizenship itself? The answer to that question will determine whether the coming biotechnological age deepens civil equality or silently replaces it with a hierarchy of differentiated futures.

CHAPTER 11

THE RIGHT TO LIFE AS A NEW RIGHT OF CITIZENSHIP

If mortality is no longer merely a metaphysical horizon but an increasingly governable field of technical intervention, then the political meaning of life itself begins to change. This is the threshold on which the present chapter stands. Earlier chapters have argued that contemporary capitalism can no longer be judged solely by how it distributes wealth, work, and opportunity within a shared temporal frame. Once biotechnology, computational medicine, and longevity science begin to affect the duration and quality of that temporal frame itself, a deeper question becomes unavoidable: can ac-

cess to healthy life extension remain a peripheral matter of healthcare policy, or must it be reconceived as one of the emerging dimensions of citizenship?

To pose the question this way is already to signal a major shift. Citizenship, in its modern democratic sense, has long been tied to a bundle of civil, political, and social rights: legal standing, political participation, education, welfare protection, labor inclusion, and access to the institutional means of a dignified life. These rights were never fully realized, nor equally distributed, but they formed the grammar through which democratic societies sought to universalize membership. Yet that grammar presupposed a largely stable anthropological background. It assumed that citizens, however unequal in practice, inhabited roughly the same biological condition: vulnerable to illness, aging, and death within a broadly common human horizon. What happens when that background itself begins to stratify?

The question is not speculative in the weak sense. Long before radical life extension becomes commonplace, existing inequalities in life expectancy, healthy lifespan, disease burden, maternal mortality, mental health, exposure to environmental toxins, workplace injuries, and access to preventive care already reveal that biological time is socially allocated. Entire neighborhoods, classes, and regions live shorter and sicker lives than others. These are not marginal differences. They are often structured by income, race, occupation, housing quality, environmental exposure, institutional reliability, food systems, and the cumulative stress of precarious existence. A society that tolerates such disparities has already accepted a hidden hierarchy of time. The difference now is that emerging technologies may deepen this hierarchy from a background injustice into an overt frontier of capability.

This is why the phrase right to life must be handled carefully. In much legal and political discourse, the right to life functions primarily

as a negative protection against direct deprivation: the prohibition of arbitrary killing, the safeguarding of bodily integrity, the duty not to expose persons to preventable death. These protections remain indispensable. But they are no longer sufficient to capture what is now at stake. If institutions and markets begin to shape access not only to survival but to materially different trajectories of aging, vitality, and biological resilience, then the right to life must be thickened. It must be understood not only as the right not to be killed, but increasingly as the right not to be structurally excluded from the conditions of a life whose duration and quality are becoming technically modifiable.

This does not imply an unlimited claim to every possible enhancement or experimental intervention. Rights cannot simply be inflated to match every new technical horizon. The issue is more disciplined. The political community must decide when a biotechnological possibility crosses the threshold from luxury frontier to civil necessity. Vaccination once occu-

pied such a threshold. So did sanitation, antibiotics, maternal care, and access to emergency medicine. Each at some point became too important to leave entirely to status or chance. The coming era may force similar decisions regarding advanced diagnostics, anti-aging interventions, regenerative therapies, gene-based treatments, or other forms of lifespan and healthspan extension. The question is not whether all such interventions should immediately be universalized, but whether democratic citizenship can remain credible if access to them becomes structurally reserved for the wealthy and well-positioned.

At stake here is the difference between private health consumption and public temporal equality. Liberal societies have long tolerated inequalities in comfort and luxury, sometimes even in educational opportunity, while still claiming that all citizens share a common political status. But if one group can increasingly purchase thicker futures—more years of health, prolonged cognitive capacity, deferred frailty,

extended participation in work and influence—while another remains exposed to ordinary decline, then the meaning of equal citizenship changes. The political community risks splitting into strata not only of wealth, but of duration. Under such conditions, the familiar promise that all are equal before the law begins to conceal a more radical inequality beneath the law: the unequal possession of future itself.

This is the point at which the right to life begins to take on a new constitutional and political significance. It becomes a right concerned with access to shared futurity. To be a citizen is not only to possess formal status in the present, but to stand within a horizon in which one's future remains institutionally countable. If some citizens are silently assigned thinner futures through structural neglect while others acquire expandable life through market-mediated access to medical and biotechnological advances, then citizenship becomes temporally bifurcated. Some belong to the future more than others.

Such bifurcation would have consequences far beyond healthcare. Pension systems, labor markets, retirement norms, family planning, inheritance structures, educational cycles, and political representation all presuppose certain distributions of lifespan and vitality. If these distributions widen dramatically, then institutions built for one temporal regime will begin to malfunction within another. Consider, for example, the political weight of actors able to remain economically and cognitively dominant for far longer than before; the intergenerational tension generated when biological extension is unevenly accessible; the strain on systems that presume retirement and dependency at ages that no longer apply symmetrically; the risk that entire professions, leadership structures, or wealth networks become durably occupied by those with access to superior longevity. A right to life reframed as a right of citizenship would therefore concern not only medicine, but the constitutional design of social time.

At this stage, an objection naturally arises. Does elevating healthy longevity into the sphere of citizenship risk medicalizing politics and turning democratic life into a permanent demand for biological enhancement? The objection is serious and should not be dismissed. The point is not to redefine the good life as endless optimization, nor to deny the existential, cultural, and spiritual complexity of finitude. The point is narrower and more urgent: when core dimensions of healthy human duration become increasingly sensitive to collective decision, public investment, and market access, political communities cannot continue to pretend that these are merely private matters. One need not worship longevity to recognize that grossly unequal access to it will destabilize the normative foundation of common life.

This is where the distinction between life and long life becomes important. The right at stake is not a utopian entitlement to indefinite existence. It is a claim that citizens should not be divided into biologically advantaged and biolo-

gically disposable populations under conditions where such division is increasingly shaped by governable structures rather than unavoidable fate. The relevant standard is not immortality. It is non-exclusion from the broadly shared benefits of advances that significantly affect healthy human duration and vitality. As in other domains of social citizenship, the aim is not identical outcomes in every respect, but the prevention of structural abandonment.

One can therefore think of the right to life in this new sense as a derivative of the same civil logic that underlies education, healthcare, and social insurance. In each case, democratic societies eventually concluded that certain goods were too constitutive of equal membership to be left entirely to market distribution. The right to life as a right of citizenship extends that logic into the temporal domain. It asks whether the conditions of a non-humiliating and broadly shareable biological future are becoming similarly constitutive. If they are, then public institutions must begin to plan accordingly—not af-

ter inequality hardens beyond reversal, but while the architecture of access is still politically shapeable.

The challenge becomes sharper when one considers how innovation is actually financed. Advanced biomedical and computational health systems rarely emerge from private ingenuity alone. They depend on public research ecosystems, university laboratories, clinical trial infrastructures, regulatory credibility, publicly educated workforces, social trust, healthcare data, and patient populations willing—or compelled—to participate in systems of experimentation and care. This means that the common contributes heavily to the production of longevity-enhancing possibilities. If the returns on these possibilities then flow back almost exclusively through private pricing mechanisms, the gap between common input and selective output becomes normatively untenable.

For this reason, the right to life as citizenship right cannot be reduced to insurance coverage, though coverage matters greatly. It also requires

institutional imagination about ownership, return, and social claim. Which parts of biomedical advance are to be treated as quasi-public goods? Which forms of life-extending innovation justify public conditions on pricing, accessibility, licensing, or reinvestment? How should common biological data be governed if it contributes to commercially valuable therapies? What obligations arise when public infrastructures have subsidized the creation of interventions that dramatically alter life chances? These are not technical side questions. They are the institutional substance of whether longevity becomes a shared civil gain or an engine of caste-like stratification.

One must also note that citizenship is not only individual but territorial. Health and longevity are profoundly place-sensitive. Regions differ in environmental quality, hospital systems, specialist availability, preventive care, labor conditions, transport access, and social support. If a new regime of life extension arrives through metropolitan hubs, elite clinics, and

premium insurance architectures while peripheral territories continue to lose years to preventable decline, then the spatial fracture of citizenship intensifies. Some places become laboratories of elongated future; others remain landscapes of compressed time. A right to life worthy of the name must therefore include territorial equalization as well as individual access.

This territorial dimension links the present chapter back to the lesson of Lear. Industrial trauma showed that communities can be optimized away economically while their civic future shrinks. The same logic can recur biotechnologically. Populations already weakened by deindustrialization, poor healthcare, environmental burden, and institutional neglect may find themselves further excluded from the coming gains of longevity science. In that case, the temporal divide would compound with the social and territorial divide already in place. A society that allowed this would not merely be unequal. It would be recursively unequal, multiplying disadvantage through time itself.

The language of citizenship is useful precisely because it resists both charity and pure consumerism. A consumer purchases what he can. A beneficiary receives what he is granted. A citizen stands within claims and obligations grounded in membership. To say that healthy life extension is becoming a question of citizenship is therefore to insist that the community as such has a stake in how future time is distributed. It is to refuse the idea that these matters belong only to private healthcare markets, corporate innovation strategies, or individualized biohacking cultures. They belong, increasingly, to the constitutional economy of belonging.

Such an argument does not eliminate the role of personal responsibility, lifestyle, prevention, or private initiative. Nor does it mean that every medical possibility must be instantly universal. It means that political communities must define thresholds beyond which exclusion becomes incompatible with equal membership. This threshold work will be difficult. Some interventions will remain expensive and uncertain. Tra-

de-offs will be real. Public budgets will face limits. But difficulty does not dissolve obligation. The core question is whether institutions are even willing to name the issue before market stratification makes naming it politically awkward.

This naming is especially urgent because social legitimacy often lags behind technological change. Once a life-extending intervention has become established as a premium commodity for upper strata, the political imagination tends to normalize that arrangement. It begins to appear obvious that first access belongs to those who can pay. Public correction then becomes more difficult, more costly, and more controversial. The right to life as a citizenship right therefore requires anticipatory politics. It demands institutions capable of acting before selective access acquires the inertia of common sense.

This anticipatory stance resonates with the broader framework of the book. A Capitalism of Meaning is not satisfied with redistributing

harms after legitimacy has already fractured. It seeks to shape the architecture of transformation while it is still open. In the context of longevity, this means building public claims into the innovation process itself: through funding conditions, public-interest licensing, sovereign biomedical funds, common-data governance, pricing obligations, territorial health infrastructure, and long-horizon planning that treats healthy lifespan as part of civic equality rather than a premium consumer upgrade.

Such planning also requires a rethinking of social citizenship beyond the welfare-state template of the twentieth century. Traditional welfare institutions were designed to protect citizens within a broadly stable temporal arc: education in youth, labor in adulthood, retirement in later life, healthcare as episodic repair. But if healthy lifespan extends unevenly, and if the capacity to remain active, productive, and cognitively vigorous becomes differentially distributed, then the old social contract may become unstable. New rights, duties, and institutions

will be needed to prevent temporal inequality from hollowing out democratic reciprocity. In this sense, the right to life as a right of citizenship is not a rhetorical add-on. It is a signal that the constitutional age of biotechnology will require a new settlement.

One should not underestimate the cultural resistance such a claim will provoke. Some will say that politics has no business in matters of lifespan extension beyond ordinary healthcare. Others will say that innovation must be left free if progress is to occur. Still others will invoke the inevitability of inequality, as though technological stratification were merely the latest expression of an ancient truth. But democratic societies have always been defined by their refusal to accept every inherited asymmetry as politically innocent. The same refusal now has to be brought to bear on the distribution of future time.

The argument of this chapter can therefore be condensed into a single proposition: once healthy human duration becomes materially al-

terable by systems shaped through public knowledge, collective infrastructures, and market asymmetries, access to it can no longer be treated solely as a private good. It begins to enter the horizon of citizenship. Not as an unlimited promise of immortality, but as a claim against structural exclusion from the common future.

This claim, if taken seriously, will compel democratic societies to ask questions they have barely begun to formulate. What counts as fair access to life-extending medicine? Which institutions should govern the social return on common biomedical investment? How can territorial inequality in healthy lifespan be treated as a constitutional problem rather than a public-health footnote? And how must labor, retirement, education, and intergenerational justice be redesigned when the horizon of life itself becomes unevenly elastic?

These questions lead directly to the next step in the argument. If citizenship can no longer be conceived apart from the politics of time, then the city of the future cannot be imagined only

as the city of comfort, rights, or consumption. It must be rethought as a city ordered to long life—one in which the very meaning of prudence, education, work, maturity, and civic virtue is transformed by a new temporal condition. The political problem of longevity thus opens onto a deeper philosophical one: what becomes of the human community when it no longer shares the same experience of time?

CHAPTER 12

THE END OF POLITICS: FROM THE CITY OF MAN TO THE CITY OF LONG LIFE

Every great political order carries within it an implicit anthropology of time. It presumes a certain sequence of life stages, a certain rhythm of maturation, productivity, decline, dependence, succession, and death. Institutions are never temporally neutral. They are built around assumptions—often unstated—about how long human beings live, when they learn, when they work, when they govern, when they inherit, when they withdraw, and how generations follow one another. The city, in this sense, is not only a spatial arrangement of power and coexistence. It is a temporal architecture. It organizes

the relation between finite lives and durable institutions.

This is why the arrival of a longevity society, even in partial or uneven form, would constitute not merely a medical or demographic shift but a philosophical and political rupture. If earlier political thought could imagine the city in relation to virtue, law, order, salvation, productivity, rights, or welfare, the city that now begins to appear on the horizon may increasingly be organized around the problem of long life. Not eternal life in the theological sense, nor the fantasy of immortality as such, but a materially extended and technically mediated human duration that alters the structure of expectation on which the modern social contract has long rested. Once this occurs, politics itself changes object. It no longer concerns only how human beings live together under law, but how they live together under divergent temporal horizons.

To approach this transition philosophically, one may begin from a broad civilizational con-

trast. The classical city, in its highest self-understanding, was ordered toward the good life. Politics concerned the formation of citizens capable of virtue, judgment, moderation, courage, and participation in a shared world governed by law and oriented by some conception of excellence. The modern city, by contrast, increasingly shifted its center toward security, comfort, commerce, rights, administration, and the management of plurality. The good life was not abandoned, but it ceased to be the explicit organizing telos of politics in the strong classical sense. The result was an order more tolerant, more procedural, more expansive in individual freedom, but also often thinner in shared moral orientation.

The emerging city of long life introduces a new axis altogether. Its defining question is no longer only what human beings ought to do with their freedom, nor only how institutions ought to distribute rights and welfare across a roughly common life-course. It is whether the temporal structure of life itself can remain

common enough to sustain reciprocity, succession, and civic equality. If some subjects begin to live longer, remain active longer, accumulate influence longer, inherit later, retire differently, learn across multiple careers, and occupy positions of power over extended spans, while others continue to inhabit compressed, vulnerable, or biologically ordinary life trajectories, then the city ceases to be a shared temporal world. It becomes a layered polity of unequal durations.

This transformation affects the very meaning of politics. Politics has always presupposed finitude. Generations enter and leave. Offices rotate because lives end. Inheritance becomes possible because mortality opens succession. Educational institutions are structured around developmental arcs. Welfare systems assume predictable phases of dependence and productivity. Even democratic impatience—the desire for responsiveness, renewal, accountability—depends partly on the fact that no one remains indefinitely situated at the center of power. Finitu-

de, in other words, has always silently underwritten circulation.

What happens when circulation slows? What happens when biological extension and enhanced healthspan allow certain actors to remain economically, cognitively, and institutionally central for far longer than before? It would be naïve to assume that such persistence automatically deepens wisdom or stability. It may instead thicken incumbency, delay succession, intensify intergenerational blockage, and entrench cumulative advantage. A society in which elite actors occupy command positions for radically prolonged periods risks producing a new politics of temporal concentration. Power would not simply be unequal in resources. It would become unequal in duration.

This is why the city of long life cannot be understood as merely the city of more years. It is a city in which the distribution of time becomes a constitutive political problem. Youth, adulthood, maturity, elderhood, dependency, and retirement all become less stable categories.

Educational systems designed to front-load learning into early life may no longer suffice for multi-career trajectories stretching across many decades. Pension structures built around fixed retirement ages may become unsustainable or unjust under uneven longevity. Family institutions may be transformed by longer coexistence between generations, delayed inheritance, extended caregiving, and altered patterns of reproduction. Political representation itself may become strained if the median age, the biological condition of electorates, and the temporal interests of differently situated citizens diverge too sharply.

The philosophical depth of this problem lies in the fact that long life is not merely quantitative. More time changes the meaning of time. The horizon within which one plans, commits, educates, invests, forgives, competes, and governs shifts when life is no longer organized around the same felt scarcity. Prudence, for example, may change meaning in a world where some can expect extended decades of vitality.

So may courage, patience, risk-taking, and ambition. A young person confronting blocked institutions dominated by long-enduring cohorts may experience politics not as shared world-building but as temporal exclusion. Conversely, older or longer-lived actors may come to treat their prolonged horizon as justification for continued authority. The conflict is no longer only over values or interests. It is over whose time sets the rhythm of the common world.

This gives the phrase the end of politics a double meaning. On one level, it names the danger that politics, as the art of organizing coexistence among finite and roughly co-temporal citizens, may weaken under conditions of temporal bifurcation. If the experience of time itself becomes radically stratified, then the basis for reciprocity may erode. Some will govern as though history were open and expandable; others will live under compressed urgency. Common deliberation becomes harder where there is no longer a common futurity. On another level, however, the phrase points to poli-

tics' new end—that is, its new telos. Politics may increasingly have to concern itself with the ordering of long life as one of its central purposes: not only protecting life from arbitrary harm, but structuring the institutions of a society in which healthy duration is more elastic, more technically mediated, and more unequally accessible.

This new telos raises profound questions of civic virtue. What sort of citizen belongs to a polity of long life? The classical citizen was formed for active participation within a bounded horizon of mortality and civic duty. The modern citizen was formed increasingly as a rights-bearing individual navigating institutions of state, market, and private life. The long-life citizen would need a different formation again: capable of repeated learning, intergenerational responsibility across longer spans, self-limitation in the face of prolonged opportunity, and perhaps above all a new discipline of temporal justice. For if one expects to occupy the world longer, one's obligations to those who ar-

rive later cannot remain unchanged. The ethics of long life cannot be built on the mere extension of private advantage. It must involve a heightened awareness of temporal stewardship.

Temporal stewardship is likely to become one of the defining civic virtues of the coming age. It names the capacity to live within extended time without appropriating the future as private property. This matters because longevity, under market conditions, can easily intensify possessiveness. The longer one lives, the more one may seek to accumulate, control, and preserve. But a city of long life can remain politically legitimate only if extended duration is accompanied by stronger forms of responsibility toward succession, access, and the circulation of opportunity. Without such virtues, long life becomes socially corrosive. It turns time into an instrument of domination.

The city of long life also forces a reconsideration of work. Industrial and post-industrial societies have generally assumed a life trajectory in which education prepares for labor, labor su-

stains adulthood, and retirement marks a final withdrawal. Even where this model never fully described reality, it helped organize institutions and expectations. In a long-life society, however, that sequence becomes unstable. People may study multiple times, work in several distinct phases, care for both parents and children across longer periods, and remain capable of contribution far later than before. Yet this transformation will not be evenly distributed. The executive in a knowledge sector, the manual worker exposed to bodily wear, the precarious platform laborer, the researcher, the caregiver, and the industrial technician will not inhabit extended time under the same conditions.

This is why the politics of long life cannot be separated from the politics of labor justice. A society that simply raises formal working ages because some sectors can sustain longer careers while ignoring the uneven embodied costs of labor will deepen temporal inequality rather than correct it. Conversely, a society that assumes universal dependency at ages increasingly

detached from actual capacities may waste enormous human potential. The challenge is to build institutions flexible enough to recognize differentiated bodies and trajectories without collapsing into a new fragmentation of status. Education, retraining, care infrastructures, phased retirement, civic service, and new models of contribution will all need rethinking if long life is not to become either a privilege of elites or a burden of exhaustion for everyone else.

Intergenerational justice is transformed as well. In a conventional democratic imaginary, generations succeed one another with sufficient regularity to make renewal politically intelligible. The young inherit institutions shaped by the old, contest them, modify them, and in turn pass them forward. But if longevity becomes unevenly expandable, succession itself may slow or distort. Wealth may remain concentrated longer. Offices may open later. Housing, capital, and authority may circulate less. Younger generations may find themselves not merely poorer, but delayed in their access to institutio-

nal adulthood. Under such conditions, resentment acquires a temporal structure: it is directed not only at inequality, but at a world that seems occupied in advance.

This temporal blockage may prove one of the most explosive dynamics of the twenty-first century. A society in which the future appears held by long-enduring incumbents while younger or shorter-lived cohorts face compressed opportunity risks producing a new antagonism more profound than many older class conflicts. The issue would no longer be simply whether the young are heard. It would be whether they can enter history on equal temporal terms. A city of long life that fails to address this will not be a city of wisdom. It will be a city of delayed succession and cumulative exclusion.

The urban and territorial implications are equally significant. Long-life societies will require different infrastructures: housing adaptable across extended lifespans, transport systems capable of sustaining mobility over longer periods, healthcare institutions oriented toward

longevity rather than episodic acute care alone, public spaces designed for multi-generational coexistence, and educational systems less rigidly tied to early-life stages. Yet here again, unequal access threatens bifurcation. Some cities may become enclaves of managed longevity, cognitive maintenance, bio-optimization, and premium care, while other territories remain zones of compressed time, chronic illness, and aging without support. The city of long life then becomes another name for spatialized temporal inequality.

This is why the philosophical question cannot remain suspended above institutional design. The city of long life is not merely an image of the future. It is a practical problem for constitutional economy. What fiscal systems can sustain longer but unevenly healthy populations? What housing and care models prevent temporal segregation? What educational reforms acknowledge lifelong formation without abandoning those whose work leaves them less able to enjoy extended vitality? What public-interest condi-

tions should be attached to longevity technologies developed through common infrastructures? How should democratic institutions preserve turnover, representation, and succession where biological extension may otherwise slow circulation? These are not secondary matters. They define whether long life becomes a common achievement or a new stratified regime.

The danger, again, is a politics without a shared horizon. Democracies depend not on identical interests, but on some minimal overlap in the temporal frame within which conflicts are negotiated. If one part of society begins to live in substantially elongated time, while another remains trapped in accelerated precarity and shorter expectancy, then common judgment becomes harder. One group will deliberate in decades; another in months. One will seek preservation; another immediate access. One will perceive risk as manageable; another as existential. Under such conditions, public reason itself may become temporally dissonant.

This is why the city of long life requires not only new policies but a new philosophy of political equality. Equality cannot mean sameness of outcome across all biological trajectories. But it cannot remain credible if access to time becomes a positional advantage guarded by wealth and infrastructure. A society serious about democratic continuity must treat the distribution of healthy duration as part of the common question, not as the ultimate luxury market. It must build institutions that protect circulation, succession, and the recognizability of a shared future even as technical capacities reshape the human lifespan.

One may therefore say that the city of long life forces a return of first questions. What are institutions for if not to order a common world across generations? What is justice if not, in part, a way of ensuring that no group monopolizes the future? What is education if not preparation for contribution within an extended yet shared temporal order? What is political wisdom if not the ability to govern power under

conditions where biological extension threatens to harden advantage rather than deepen civilization?

A Capitalism of Meaning cannot avoid these questions because it is concerned not only with income, work, or legitimacy in the narrow sense, but with the conditions under which a society remains narratable to itself. The city of long life becomes narratable only if more time does not sever the bond between the living, the arriving, and the not-yet-represented. This requires institutions of temporal justice: institutions that prevent duration from becoming domination, that preserve turnover without wasting capability, and that link the benefits of longevity back to the common good.

The chapter thus reaches its central conclusion. The future political community will not be defined only by how it regulates markets, protects rights, or governs technology. It will also be defined by how it orders time. If the city of long life is left to market stratification, it will become a city of temporal castes. If it is brought

within a framework of civic equality, public return, and institutional redesign, it may become the site of a new democratic settlement adequate to biotechnology's challenge. The difference between those futures is not technical. It is political in the deepest sense.

With this, the biopolitical section of the book reaches its philosophical culmination. But the argument now turns outward again, toward the movement that has perhaps most aggressively attempted to answer the exhaustion of modern institutions through technology, exceptional agency, and private strategic power. To understand why the city of long life cannot be abandoned to technolibertarian imagination, one must now confront that imagination directly—in its genealogy, its diagnosis, and its profound insufficiencies. The next task is therefore clear: to examine the technoright not as caricature, but as one of the most powerful, seductive, and incomplete responses to the crisis of the West.

CHAPTER 13

THE SYSTEMIC SOCIAL DIVIDEND

The central political question of the coming decades will not be whether advanced economies are able to produce wealth, but whether they are still able to justify the way that wealth is produced, distributed, and legitimized. For a long time, capitalism survived its contradictions by promising mobility, growth, and inclusion. Even when inequalities were visible, the system retained a certain narrative force: it could still present itself as a structure through which sacrifice might one day become reward, and through which private initiative could be understood as contributing, however imperfectly, to a broader public horizon. That promise has been severely weakened. In many contem-

porary societies, productivity rises while security declines, innovation accelerates while institutions lose credibility, and the gains of transformation appear increasingly detached from the communities that make transformation possible in the first place.

This is why redistribution, in its traditional defensive form, is no longer enough. The categories inherited from industrial modernity remain too narrow to confront a civilization in which value is extracted not only from labor in the classical sense, but from infrastructures, territories, social stability, public research, accumulated trust, legal orders, logistical systems, patterns of behavior, and vast reservoirs of data continuously generated by collective life. In this new context, the old opposition between market wealth and public correction becomes conceptually insufficient. What must be reconsidered is not merely how to tax wealth after its production, but how to recognize that much of what is called private success is in fact system-dependent from the beginning.

The idea of a Systemic Social Dividend emerges precisely from this shift. It does not begin from pity, nor from a language of assistance, nor from the moral embarrassment of extreme inequality. It begins from a prior question of title. If the most powerful firms in the world generate extraordinary value through ecosystems sustained by public order, social peace, legal guarantees, digital infrastructures, urban concentration, educational formation, and collective behavioral input, then the social body is not external to value creation. It is one of its constitutive conditions. A dividend is therefore the proper term because it implies participation in a shared generative base. It names not a concession from above, but a claim grounded in coproduction.

This distinction is decisive. A welfare payment may be withdrawn, stigmatized, or framed as compensation for failure. A dividend, by contrast, expresses membership in a common system of value. It acknowledges that citizens are not merely recipients of policy, but implicit

shareholders in the conditions that make large-scale accumulation possible. The dignity of the concept lies here. It transforms the grammar of distribution from rescue to recognition. It says that where wealth has become infrastructural, participation in its benefits must also become structural.

The classical example often invoked in discussions of social dividend is the Alaska Permanent Fund, through which part of the revenue generated by natural resources is redistributed to citizens. Its symbolic force lies in a simple intuition: if a resource belongs to all, then extraordinary gains extracted from that resource cannot be morally or politically monopolized by a few. Yet in the twenty-first century, the strategic resources of civilization are no longer limited to oil, gas, or minerals. They include data, platform dependency, public interoperability, scientific knowledge developed across generations, and the civic and institutional environments without which no innovation ecosystem could scale. What earlier ages reco-

gnized in the subsoil must now be recognized in the social and digital commons.

This means that the Systemic Social Dividend should not be imagined as a purely fiscal instrument. It is a constitutional idea in the deeper sense of the term. It redefines the relationship between innovation and legitimacy. It asks whether a political community still has the right to consider itself sovereign if it allows all major gains from systemic transformation to be privatized while the resulting costs are diffused across workers, families, territories, and future generations. These costs are not abstract. They appear as the erosion of local economies, the collapse of civic time, the destabilization of life planning, the conversion of public services into residual mechanisms, and the chronicization of distrust. A society that socializes fragility while privatizing acceleration is not merely unequal. It is disordered at the level of meaning.

The point, then, is not to punish success but to restore reciprocity. In healthy political orders, citizens tolerate asymmetry when they

perceive circulation. They accept that not all roles, rewards, or risks are the same, provided that the system remains intelligible and that the benefits of transformation return in visible ways to the collective world. When that circulation breaks, resentment becomes rational. People do not revolt only because others possess more. They revolt because the connection between gain and obligation has disappeared. The elite ceases to appear as a functional upper stratum and begins to appear as a seceded extraction class.

A Systemic Social Dividend responds to this by institutionalizing return. That return may take monetary form, but it need not be limited to direct cash transfers. It can also be embodied in guaranteed public investment, civic infrastructure, educational endowments, territorial regeneration, family security, health access, and transition funds for communities structurally exposed to technological displacement. The crucial principle is visibility. Citizens must be able to see that the wealth generated through

common conditions does not vanish into abstract capitalization, but comes back into the world as stabilizing reciprocity.

This is also why the social dividend differs from universal basic income in its philosophical grounding. Universal basic income is often defended as a humanitarian adaptation to automation, a way of protecting consumption in a labor market that may no longer offer sufficient inclusion. There is merit in this approach, but it risks retaining a passive anthropology. It can frame the citizen as someone who must be compensated because the system no longer needs him. The Systemic Social Dividend begins elsewhere. It frames the citizen as someone whose society continues to generate value through collective conditions to which he already belongs. Its message is not: you are being supported because you are superfluous. Its message is: you are entitled to a return because the system cannot exist without the world you help sustain.

At stake, therefore, is more than income security. What is being rebuilt is the moral architec-

ture of belonging. If citizens are reduced to spectators of transformations they neither control nor benefit from, democracy hollows out. But if they are recognized as participants in the generative base of collective wealth, then political community regains substance. The dividend becomes a civic language through which societies can say to themselves that innovation is not an external force imposed upon them, but a process that remains accountable to the common world.

The Systemic Social Dividend should thus be understood as a mechanism of civil reattachment. It is one answer to the fracture between wealth and recognizability. It does not solve every problem of capitalism, nor does it replace the need for institutional reform, labor dignity, or meaningful human oversight of decision systems. But it establishes a principle without which the future will become increasingly ungovernable: where value is systemic, return must be systemic as well. Otherwise the political order will continue to produce a class of

people who are told, every day, that they live in a rich society while experiencing that society as a machine that no longer knows their name.

CHAPTER 14

LONGEVITY, BIOPOLITICS, AND THE RISK OF BIOLOGICAL CASTES

Every civilization reveals its deepest moral structure in the way it confronts finitude. For centuries, the human condition was organized around a relatively stable biological horizon. To be born, to grow, to decline, and to die were not merely private events, but anthropological constants that shaped institutions, inheritance, education, succession, politics, and the rhythm of collective expectation. Modernity challenged many limits, but mortality remained, in a profound sense, the final symmetry. It was the boundary before which even the most powerful had eventually to bend.

That symmetry is now under pressure. Advances in biotechnology, genomics, regenerative medicine, precision therapeutics, and age-reversal research are beginning to move longevity from the realm of dream into the realm of strategic planning. One need not indulge in fantasy to see the civilizational magnitude of this transition. The question is no longer whether medicine will extend healthy life at the margins. It is whether the extension of biological time itself will become a new axis of inequality. If so, humanity will enter a political era more destabilizing than any prior economic divide: a world in which some can buy not simply comfort or influence, but duration.

This possibility must be approached without sentimentality. There is nothing inherently illegitimate in fighting disease, reducing suffering, or postponing degeneration. On the contrary, much of medicine's nobility lies precisely in its refusal to naturalize pain merely because it has always existed. A society committed to human dignity should welcome therapies that preserve

vitality, cognition, and freedom from avoidable decline. The real problem emerges elsewhere. It appears when technologies of life extension remain embedded within an order that distributes all major benefits through purchasing power alone. In that case, longevity ceases to be a medical achievement and becomes a mechanism of stratification.

The result would not simply be inequality in the familiar economic sense. It would be the emergence of biological castes. One stratum of society would enjoy expanding life horizons, prolonged cognitive power, delayed frailty, and the capacity to remain economically, politically, and culturally dominant for far longer than previous generations. Another stratum would remain confined to traditional decline, exposed to the old biological timetable while competing against actors who are, in effect, playing the same game with more decades at their disposal. Such a world would not merely contain injustice. It would alter the meaning of historical coexistence. People would inhabit the same formal

society while belonging to different temporal species.

This is why the politics of longevity cannot be left to market logic alone. When a technology bears directly on the structure of the human lifespan, it exceeds the category of luxury consumption. It touches the architecture of citizenship. It affects intergenerational succession, pension systems, leadership turnover, wealth concentration, access to opportunity, and the cultural metabolism of renewal. To treat all this as though it were merely a matter of private choice is to misunderstand the scale of the transition. The question is not whether affluent individuals will purchase better medicine. The question is whether societies can remain democratic when access to biological time itself becomes asymmetrically privatized.

Here the language of the commons reappears in a new form. Much of contemporary biomedical innovation depends on collective substrates: public funding, national health systems, university research, shared genetic databases,

long-term epidemiological observation, and the socialization of scientific risk. Even where private firms commercialize the final therapy, the knowledge ecology from which the therapy emerges is seldom purely private. This creates a strong civic argument for regarding the fruits of longevity research as partially rooted in common inheritance. If so, then radically unequal access to life-extending treatment becomes harder to justify, not only morally but conceptually.

The deeper danger is that a civilization already fractured by wealth, visibility, and political resentment may now add temporal hierarchy to its internal divisions. Imagine a world in which elite decision-makers remain active, connected, and biologically reinforced across spans once unimaginable, while younger generations face blocked advancement, delayed inheritance, and institutions occupied for decades longer by the same bodies and the same networks. Stagnation would no longer be accidental. It would become somatic. History itself would thicken. Entry into

responsibility would be postponed not by law, but by the prolonged endurance of those already in command.

This would intensify a crisis already visible in many societies: the perception that doors do not open, that rotation has slowed, that prestige accumulates faster than it circulates, and that formal meritocracy conceals hardened structures of continuity. Longevity technologies, if distributed through pure market selection, could transform this perception into a permanent regime. A democracy cannot remain healthy if an entire generation begins to feel that even time has been privatized against it.

For this reason, a serious politics of longevity must rest on two principles. The first is shared access. No society should permit life-extending biomedical advances to become the exclusive privilege of narrow elites if those advances depend, in substantial part, on common research infrastructures and collective data environments. The second is temporal stewardship. Extended life cannot simply mean indefinite occupa-

tion. It must be accompanied by new civic norms governing succession, withdrawal, mentorship, and the ethical use of prolonged power.

Temporal stewardship may sound unusual today, but it will become unavoidable tomorrow. Every society depends on some rhythm of replacement. New generations do not merely need resources; they need openings. They need the possibility of entering institutions, transforming them, and inheriting responsibility before social time becomes petrified. If medicine succeeds in extending vigorous adulthood significantly, then political and organizational cultures must learn the art of voluntarily making room. Without such an ethic, longevity will intensify conflict between generations until continuity itself appears as domination.

This is not an argument against extending healthy life. It is an argument against anti-political innocence. Technical success cannot be allowed to hide institutional consequence. The desire to overcome decline is intelligible and, within limits, admirable. But every expansion

of biological possibility creates a corresponding demand for moral and civic architecture. Otherwise, what begins as compassion for fragility ends as the entrenchment of asymmetry.

The question of longevity therefore belongs inside the broader argument of Capitalism of Meaning. A civilization worthy of the future cannot judge innovation solely by capacity. It must judge innovation by the kind of human world it produces. If the most advanced societies cure disease while destroying reciprocity, extend life while freezing circulation, and increase duration while shrinking common destiny, then their triumph will be internally hollow. They will have defeated aging only to deepen estrangement.

The alternative is not refusal, but political maturation. Longevity must be integrated into a public philosophy of shared benefit, intergenerational fairness, and civic continuity. The right response to biotechnological power is neither naive celebration nor reactionary fear. It is to insist that the extension of life remain subordi-

nate to the legibility of the human order. No one should have to choose between scientific progress and social justice. But that will only be true if societies act early enough to prevent the age of longevity from becoming the age of biological aristocracy.

CHAPTER 15

CAPITALISM OF MEANING

A civilization is not judged only by what it can build, compute, extract, or optimize. It is judged by whether human beings can still live inside its transformations without becoming strangers to themselves. This is the horizon toward which the argument of this book has been moving from the beginning. The crisis of our time is not simply that capitalism produces inequality, nor only that technology moves faster than politics. Those are real problems, but they are not the deepest one. The deeper crisis is that the organizing systems of contemporary life are losing their capacity to justify themselves in terms that remain humanly inhabitable. They function, often brilliantly, while the social world

around them becomes less intelligible, less trustworthy, and less shared.

This is what is meant by Capitalism of Meaning. It is not a slogan for ethical branding, nor a decorative invitation to kindness in markets otherwise unchanged. It names a more demanding transformation. It begins from the recognition that no economic order can remain legitimate if it continuously accelerates productive power while eroding the civic, symbolic, and relational conditions that allow people to recognize themselves in a common future. An economy is never only an allocation mechanism. It is also a producer of temporal horizons, social expectations, forms of visibility, distributions of dignity, and experiences of inclusion or abandonment. It shapes not only what people have, but what they believe the world is for.

When that shaping function becomes opaque, legitimacy weakens. Citizens may continue to consume, work, click, and adapt, but beneath the surface an anthropological fracture opens. People begin to feel that transformation is al-

ways happening to them and never with them. They experience decisions as distant yet invasive, justified by technical vocabularies they did not choose and cannot contest. Their labor may still be used, their data still harvested, their compliance still expected, but the narrative bond that once linked effort to belonging begins to dissolve. Resentment, in this sense, is not an irrational surplus. It is often the emotional form taken by a broken relation between system and meaning.

A Capitalism of Meaning therefore asks a prior question before the usual economic ones. Not only can this be done, or will it scale, or is it efficient, but what kind of world does it make visible? Does it strengthen the recognizability of collective life, or does it render responsibility harder to locate? Does it widen participation in the goods it generates, or does it privatize gains while diffusing fragility? Does it preserve the civic time necessary for education, care, trust, and intergenerational continuity, or does it consume those invisible infrastructures as though

they were costless? These are not sentimental questions appended to economics after the fact. They are questions about the truth conditions of any durable order.

To speak of meaning here is not to dissolve politics into subjectivity. Meaning is not mood. It is a public structure of intelligibility. A society has meaning when the relationship between sacrifice and return, innovation and legitimacy, authority and accountability, remains sufficiently legible for citizens to inhabit it without humiliation. It has meaning when change does not arrive solely as dispossession disguised as necessity. It has meaning when power can still be narrated within a framework of reciprocity rather than merely imposed through procedure, abstraction, or inevitability.

This is why the book has insisted on the importance of civic happiness, social recognition, threshold spaces, meaningful human supervision, the Systemic Social Dividend, and the political regulation of emerging biotechnologies. These are not disconnected reforms. They are

components of a wider attempt to restore correspondence between productive systems and the human world they claim to serve. Their common principle is simple: no process of transformation should be considered fully rational if it destroys the very conditions that allow society to metabolize transformation without disintegration.

The old industrial compromise gave people a place within history, however imperfectly. The new algorithmic order risks giving them only exposure. They are measured, predicted, nudged, sorted, and monetized, but not necessarily addressed as members of a shared political world. If this continues, democracies will become increasingly unstable because the language of citizenship will no longer match the experience of everyday life. Formal rights will persist, but the lived substance of reciprocity will thin out. At that point, systems do not collapse because they are inefficient. They collapse because too many people cease to believe that the future being built has a place for them.

Capitalism of Meaning is an attempt to prevent that outcome without retreating into nostalgia or anti-modern romanticism. It does not call for the rejection of technology, the freezing of markets, or the sentimental restoration of vanished certainties. It accepts that innovation is real, that complexity is irreversible, and that large-scale coordination requires technical sophistication. What it rejects is the superstition that sophistication is enough. A system is not absolved by its performance. It must still answer for the civilization it leaves behind.

This is where the contrast with both technocratic neutrality and technolibertarian exit becomes clear. The technocratic temptation says that if institutions are optimized, calibrated, and insulated from conflict, legitimacy will follow automatically. The technolibertarian temptation says that the common world is too slow, too compromised, too democratic, and that the truly capable should simply build beyond it. Both positions fail for the same reason. Neither can generate a credible account of shared destiny.

One hides politics inside procedure; the other abandons politics in favor of selective secession. A Capitalism of Meaning refuses both evasions. It insists that power must remain answerable to the common world, and that innovation worthy of the future must deepen rather than sever the conditions of collective inhabitation.

At the center of this vision lies a stricter definition of progress. Progress cannot be reduced to acceleration, abstraction, or expansion of capability. Progress must include the capacity of a society to remain readable to itself while it changes. It must include the preservation of trust as an infrastructure, of cohesion as a precondition of freedom, and of reciprocity as the grammar that keeps inequality from mutating into civil fracture. It must include the protection of those domains of life that are not efficient in a narrow sense but are indispensable to human continuity: care, formation, transmission, symbolic recognition, territorial belonging, and the possibility of being more than a

variable inside someone else's optimization model.

In this light, the task ahead is not merely institutional but civilizational. Societies must decide whether they want to become collections of highly efficient systems managing increasingly dislocated populations, or whether they still believe that economy, technology, and governance should serve a humanly legible order. That choice cannot be postponed forever. Every delay strengthens structures of extraction, opacity, and asymmetry that become harder to reverse once normalized.

A Capitalism of Meaning does not promise paradise. It promises something more serious: a criterion by which a society can judge whether its own intelligence has become self-destructive. It asks that wealth be tethered again to return, innovation to obligation, power to recognizability, and the future to shared habitability. Its wager is that human beings will accept complexity, risk, even sacrifice, if they can still see themselves reflected in the world being made.

But no civilization can long survive when it asks entire populations to adapt endlessly to transformations that no longer speak a language they can morally recognize.

The final question, then, is not whether the future will be more powerful. It almost certainly will be. The final question is whether it will remain humanly deserved. That is the standard by which the coming age must be measured. Not only what it can do, but what it makes possible to inhabit together. Not only how far it can go, but whether the road it opens is still one on which a society may walk without losing its soul.

CHAPTER 16

THE FOUR OPERATIONAL PILLARS

A book that diagnoses only crisis, however lucidly, risks becoming one more refined expression of the very paralysis it denounces. If the Capitalism of Meaning is to deserve its name, it must culminate not in lament, nor in philosophical consolation, nor even in critique alone, but in a practical architecture capable of translating its normative claims into institutional direction. This does not mean reducing the complexity of the argument to a checklist. It means accepting that any serious response to the contemporary crisis must become operable. The world will not be repaired by concepts that cannot enter budgets, laws, governance systems,

public institutions, territorial strategies, and technologies of return.

The chapters so far have established several things. First, that advanced societies are suffering from a deep legitimacy crisis rooted not only in inequality, but in the growing opacity of decision and the breakdown of social intelligibility. Second, that the dominant liberal-managerial order has become too thin to metabolize the conflicts generated by its own transformations. Third, that the technoright, though often sharper in diagnosis, remains normatively insufficient because it privileges capacity without adequately rebuilding reciprocity, public meaning, and common return. Fourth, that the civil economy tradition and the concept of public happiness provide a richer anthropological and institutional horizon. Fifth, that the Systemic Social Dividend, meaningful human control, and anti-sacrificial institutions point toward a different ordering principle altogether.

The question now is how such a principle can be articulated politically without collapsing into

either vagueness or bureaucratic overreach. The answer proposed here takes the form of four operational pillars. They are not intended as a final blueprint, still less as a rigid doctrine to be applied mechanically across contexts. Rather, they represent four strategic domains within which a Capitalism of Meaning must take institutional shape if it is to become more than a philosophical possibility: first, democratic control over algorithmic and strategic decision systems; second, the reorganization of work and contribution in the age of long life and intelligent automation; third, the creation of mechanisms capable of converting systemic gains into territorial and social return; and fourth, the rebuilding of inclusion through infrastructures that protect the vulnerable from becoming the routine carriers of transformation costs.

These pillars are connected. They should not be imagined as parallel policy silos. Together they form a coherent response to a single civilizational problem: how to govern a society of accelerated transformation without consuming

the trust, cohesion, and temporal equality on which a common future depends. Each pillar therefore corresponds to a site where the contemporary order most visibly fails. The first addresses the disappearance of decision into infrastructure. The second addresses the destabilization of work, contribution, and temporal justice. The third addresses the absence of visible return from common-conditioned wealth. The fourth addresses the fact that systems still too easily preserve efficiency by concentrating fragility downward.

1. DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OVER ALGORITHMIC AND STRATEGIC DECISION SYSTEMS

The first pillar begins from a blunt recognition: a growing share of consequential decisions is no longer made in forms that remain publicly legible. Public administrations, large firms, platforms, health systems, financial institutions, and security architectures increasingly operate through complex mixtures of predictive tools, automated triage, risk scoring, recommender systems, optimization routines, and decision-support environments whose normative assumptions remain weakly visible. This produces not only technical opacity, but political di-

splacement. Decisions with major social effects are rendered as outputs, while responsibility diffuses across systems, vendors, committees, and models.

To address this, democratic control must move beyond transparency as a standalone value. Transparency matters, but it is insufficient where the real issue is closure. The key question is not simply whether a system can be inspected after the fact, but whether institutional structures exist that can re-open the decisional space before technical outputs harden into administrative or commercial inevitability. This implies at least five operational consequences.

First, high-impact algorithmic systems should be subjected to pre-decisional governance requirements, not merely ex post audit. Institutions must justify why a domain is appropriate for automation, which human goods are at stake, which risks of proxy distortion exist, and what forms of contestation will remain available. Second, meaningful human control must be specified substantively rather than pro-

cedurally. A human in the loop is not enough. Institutions must identify answerable subjects capable of understanding the normative stakes of the system and authorized to interrupt or reframe deployment before closure. Third, threshold spaces of judgment must be built inside organizations and administrations—structured sites where technical, legal, ethical, territorial, and social consequences can be brought into view before implementation. Fourth, systems with high distributive or civic impact should be required to document decisional framing, not merely technical performance: why these variables, these trade-offs, this error tolerance, this conception of harm? Fifth, citizens subject to algorithmically mediated decisions must retain pathways of appeal that are real, accessible, and capable of altering outcomes rather than merely explaining them.

The broader goal is not to slow every institution into paralysis, nor to romanticize pre-digital administration. It is to restore the principle that no significant architecture of classification,

prioritization, and intervention should become sovereign by default. Democratic societies must learn to govern intelligent systems not only through compliance, but through public answerability. Otherwise, they will continue to inhabit a condition in which power acts most forcefully where it appears least visibly as power.

2. REORGANIZING WORK AND CONTRIBUTION IN THE AGE OF LONG LIFE AND INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION

The second pillar addresses a transformation no less destabilizing than algorithmic governance: the slow disarticulation of the inherited relation between education, labor, productivity, aging, and citizenship. Industrial and post-industrial societies built institutions around a relatively stable temporal sequence—early education, adult work, retirement, dependency, intergenerational succession. This sequence is now under pressure from multiple directions at once. Intelligent automation is changing the nature of work, not only by displacing tasks but by

redistributing authority within decision-making systems. At the same time, the horizon of longevity is beginning to stretch unevenly, making old assumptions about retirement, usefulness, decline, and contribution increasingly fragile.

A Capitalism of Meaning cannot answer this simply by defending employment as it existed or by celebrating "the future of work" in abstract terms. It must build a new settlement around contribution. Contribution is a broader category than employment. It includes paid labor, but also care, learning, local institution-building, civic work, social reproduction, territorial stewardship, and transitional re-skilling across the life-course. If societies continue to tie dignity and security too rigidly to shrinking models of linear labor participation, they will produce both exclusion and resentment. If they respond by dissolving work into passive transfer alone, they risk hollowing meaning as well as income.

The operational implication is that education, labor law, welfare design, and retirement sy-

stems must be reconfigured around longer, less linear, and more differentiated trajectories. Lifelong education must cease to be a slogan and become an institutional right with serious public investment. Workers in sectors exposed to automation, ecological transition, or industrial relocation must have access not merely to short-term re-skilling but to long-horizon pathways linking training to actual sectors of future relevance. Retirement systems must be made more flexible without treating all bodies and professions as temporally interchangeable. Those in physically exhausting or high-exposure labor cannot simply be asked to work longer because elites in knowledge sectors can do so. Likewise, those capable of extended contribution should not be wastefully pushed into social irrelevance by outdated assumptions about age.

This pillar also implies a new politics of time. If some citizens begin to enjoy longer, healthier, and more productive lives than others, then labor institutions must actively prevent temporal

inequality from becoming civic inequality. Phased retirement, flexible re-entry into education, support for care burdens across multiple life stages, protections against age-linked exclusion, and new forms of civic service may all become necessary. The goal is not merely employment adaptation, but the creation of a social order in which longer life and technological productivity do not translate into blocked succession, accumulated exclusion, or the temporal obsolescence of those unable to match elite trajectories.

3. CONVERTING SYSTEMIC GAINS INTO TERRITORIAL AND SOCIAL RETURN

The third pillar is the institutional heart of the book's economic proposal. It begins from the recognition that contemporary capitalism increasingly generates wealth through common-conditioned infrastructures while externalizing long-wave social costs into territories, communities, and institutions unable to claim visible return. Data extraction, platform concentration, financial intermediation, industrial restructuring, ecological transition, public-research spillovers, and future biotechnological rents all depend on common conditions of value creation. Yet the dominant architecture of

capitalism continues to treat the social body mainly as a background absorber of consequences, not as an entitled participant in systemic gains.

The answer proposed here is the development of mechanisms of structured return, of which the Systemic Social Dividend is the central form. This dividend should not be imagined as a simplistic unconditional cash transfer detached from institutional context. Rather, it should be built as a layered architecture linking gains derived from common-conditioned value to direct social and territorial reinvestment. Its sources may vary by country and historical phase: natural resource rents, digital data rents, excess returns derived from strategic infrastructures, value generated by public research and health systems, gains from ecological transition regimes, or fiscal instruments targeting concentrations of extraction made possible by common conditions.

Its uses should be equally structured. Part of the return may take the form of universal or

quasi-universal direct dividends, especially where symbolic visibility matters. But a substantial portion should be oriented toward place-based reintegration: schools, healthcare systems, digital public infrastructure, local enterprise funds, vocational institutions, transport renewal, environmental repair, family support, and regional transition platforms in areas disproportionately exposed to industrial, ecological, or technological disruption. In this sense, the dividend is not simply redistributive. It is constitutional-economic. It binds the legitimacy of transformation to visible return.

Operationally, this requires institutional vehicles capable of credibility across time: sovereign or semi-sovereign social funds, legally ring-fenced transition mechanisms, clear public criteria for allocation, independent governance with democratic oversight, and transparent links between the source of the gain and the form of the return. The goal is to prevent both clientelism and abstraction. Citizens must be able to see that the system is not merely extrac-

ting, but also returning. Without such visibility, even significant spending may fail to rebuild trust, because it remains mediated through opaque fiscal channels that do not alter the grammar of abandonment.

4. REBUILDING INCLUSION THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURES OF PROTECTION AND NON-SACRIFICIAL TRANSITION

The fourth pillar addresses the problem that runs beneath all the others: the recurrent tendency of advanced systems to preserve efficiency by concentrating fragility downward. The vulnerable continue to function as the default carriers of costs—whether in labor markets, digital environments, environmental transitions, healthcare access, or territorial decline. If a Capitalism of Meaning is serious, it must break with this sacrificial pattern. Inclusion cannot remain the soft edge of policy language while ex-

clusion remains structurally embedded in the actual processing of transformation.

What is required, therefore, is a shift from compensatory inclusion to infrastructural inclusion. Compensatory inclusion responds after exclusion has already taken shape. Infrastructural inclusion builds conditions that reduce the likelihood that whole groups, classes, generations, or territories become routine bearers of systemic adjustment. This means investing in universalist but differentiated public goods: health systems capable of reducing temporal inequality in life expectancy and healthy lifespan; education systems able to sustain repeated learning across long lives; housing and transport infrastructures that prevent territorial abandonment; digital public infrastructures that protect citizens from becoming mere data surfaces; and care systems that recognize dependency not as failure but as part of the social metabolism of any durable order.

It also means building stronger institutions of transition. Whenever major industrial, techno-

logical, environmental, or administrative shifts occur, affected populations should not meet the future only under the sign of adaptation. There must be institutional spaces in which the burdens of change are named, measured, and redistributed before they harden into humiliation. This includes early-warning systems for territorial stress, civic compacts for sectors undergoing reorganization, social-impact obligations attached to high-disruption transformations, and public infrastructures for legal, educational, psychological, and economic support in communities facing systemic shocks.

The anti-sacrificial dimension is essential. Inclusion is not merely about giving more to those who have less. It is about preventing the repeated use of the same populations as absorbers of instability generated elsewhere. A society that fails here will continue to oscillate between managerial denial and periodic outbursts of anger. One that succeeds will not eliminate conflict, but it will reduce the pressure toward scapegoa-

ting by making transformation more visibly shared in both burden and return.

FROM PILLARS TO SETTLEMENT

Taken together, these four pillars amount to more than a reform package. They outline the structure of a new settlement between innovation, power, and common life. The first pillar restores legibility to decision. The second reorders the relation between work, time, and dignity. The third reconnects systemic wealth to civic return. The fourth prevents vulnerability from remaining the hidden infrastructure of progress. None of these pillars can stand alone. Algorithmic accountability without social return will still feel hollow. Dividends without a rethought labor horizon may soften insecurity without restoring meaning. Inclusion without control over strategic decision systems may be-

come permanent reactive repair. But together they begin to articulate a political economy in which freedom, capacity, and legitimacy are no longer treated as enemies.

Such a settlement will not emerge automatically. It demands coalition-building across domains often kept separate: labor and technology, territorial development and finance, democratic theory and industrial policy, healthcare and constitutional design, AI governance and social citizenship. It also requires a new political language. The old rhetoric of modernization is too thin, the rhetoric of rights too fragmented when detached from temporal and social architecture, and the rhetoric of efficiency too blind to civic consequence. What is needed is a language capable of saying, in one breath, that societies must build, innovate, compete, and govern strategically—and that they must do so in ways that thicken rather than consume the conditions of a shared future.

This is the operative meaning of the Capitalism of Meaning. It is not anti-market, anti-tech-

nology, or anti-growth. Nor is it a moral gloss on the status quo. It is a demand that the architecture of transformation become institutionally answerable to trust, reciprocity, temporal justice, and public intelligibility. Its measure of success is not only output, but whether citizens can still recognize themselves in the future being built.

The final chapter will turn to the financial dimension of this settlement. For if the four pillars define the fields in which reconstruction must occur, one further question remains: what kind of capital architecture can sustain them? How can finance itself cease to function merely as extractor or allocator of returns and become, instead, one of the institutions through which public happiness and systemic resilience are materially underwritten? To answer that, one must confront the limits of philanthrocapitalism and explore the possibility of finance as a public-forming force rather than a private afterthought.

CHAPTER 17

IMPACT FINANCE AS A NEW INSTITUTION: BEYOND PHILANTHROCAPITALISM

If the previous chapter outlined the four operational pillars through which a Capitalism of Meaning could begin to take institutional form, one decisive question still remains unresolved: what kind of capital architecture can sustain such a project over time? It is not enough to identify the domains in which democratic control, temporal justice, territorial return, and non-sacrificial inclusion must be rebuilt. One must also ask how resources are to be mobilized, governed, disciplined, and directed. For one of the deepest features of contemporary capitalism is that finance has become at once ex-

traordinarily powerful and strangely under-politicized in the public imagination. It is discussed either as a neutral allocator of efficiency, as a technical subsystem of markets, or else as an object of moral suspicion. Too rarely is it confronted as an institutional force capable of shaping the temporal and civic structure of a society.

This omission is costly. Finance is not merely the sector through which capital is priced, pooled, and distributed. It is one of the principal ways in which a civilization organizes its relation to the future. It decides, often silently, which projects will be funded, which risks will be underwritten, which temporal horizons are considered investable, which territories are deemed strategic, which sectors may survive periods of transition, and which populations will bear the costs of non-investment. In this sense, finance is not external to the social question. It is one of its deepest mechanisms. A society that leaves finance entirely within the grammar of short-term return while asking po-

litics to repair the civic wreckage afterward has already conceded too much.

This is why the question of impact finance must be handled with unusual rigor. In its dominant contemporary form, impact finance often occupies an ambiguous space. At its best, it represents a sincere effort to direct capital toward social, environmental, and institutional goods that conventional investment models underprice or ignore. It attempts to connect returns to measurable public value, to create instruments that reward positive externalities, and to mobilize resources for projects that matter beyond narrow shareholder gain. Yet in its weaker and more fashionable versions, impact finance risks becoming a soft moral supplement to a harder architecture of extraction. It can turn into a language of reputational elegance through which capital narrates itself as benevolent without altering the deeper asymmetries of value capture, decision opacity, or civic abandonment.

The distinction between these two paths is essential. The issue is not whether capital can ever pursue social goods. Of course it can. The issue is whether those goods remain dependent on discretionary moral preference at the top, or whether they become structurally built into the institutional logic of investment itself. This is the dividing line between philanthrocapitalism and finance as a public-forming institution.

Philanthrocapitalism, in the relevant sense, is not merely philanthropy practiced by wealthy actors. It is a broader orientation in which the correction of capitalism's harms remains subordinate to the discretionary judgment of those who benefit most from capitalism's gains. Social problems become sites of intervention chosen from above, often intelligently and even generously, but still according to asymmetrical power over what counts as worthy, urgent, scalable, and legible. The public may benefit. But the civic form remains weak. The community is addressed less as a co-author of the common good than as the recipient of strategically direc-

ted benevolence. Even when outcomes are positive, the structure of legitimacy remains thin.

This thinness matters. A society cannot sustainably build its future on a model in which major social and territorial needs depend on whether private concentrations of wealth happen to find them interesting, fundable, or reputationally resonant. Such a model may produce islands of innovation, admirable interventions, and temporary relief. But it cannot substitute for an institutional order in which the relation between capital and public happiness is governed by recognizable principles of return, accountability, and shared claim. The problem with philanthrocapitalism is not that it does too much good. It is that it leaves too much of the common future contingent upon private discretion.

To move beyond this, one must rethink finance itself as a constitutional-economic institution. This means treating the organization of capital not only as a market function, but as part of the architecture through which a polity deci-

des what sort of future becomes materially possible. Finance, in this stronger sense, should be judged not merely by efficiency of allocation or even by the inclusion of ESG metrics, but by whether it thickens the capacity of a society to remain trust-bearing, territorially coherent, and politically legible under conditions of transformation.

Several consequences follow from this shift. First, one must distinguish between capital that merely avoids harm and capital that actively contributes to systemic resilience. The former is already difficult; the latter is much rarer. It is one thing to screen investments for obvious damage. It is another to create instruments that directly support social cohesion, territorial regeneration, democratic capacity, or access to long-horizon public goods. A Capitalism of Meaning requires the second form. It needs financial vehicles designed not simply to appear responsible, but to underwrite the infrastructures without which responsibility elsewhere becomes impossible.

Second, this implies the need for institutions capable of carrying longer temporal horizons than ordinary market cycles reward. Many of the goods central to this book—education across the life-course, territorial regeneration after industrial trauma, public digital infrastructures, resilient healthcare systems, common biomedical platforms, transition support for vulnerable sectors, anti-sacrificial inclusion mechanisms—do not yield their deepest returns on the timeline of quarterly performance. They require patient capital, blended public-private structures, sovereign or quasi-sovereign social funds, and legal frameworks that protect strategic investment from being constantly cannibalized by short-term extraction. Without such temporal depth, the rhetoric of impact remains superficial.

Third, the social meaning of finance depends on governance. A fund with a socially beneficial purpose can still reproduce opacity, elite capture, and low legitimacy if its criteria, oversight, and return pathways remain weakly visible. Go-

vernance therefore becomes part of the asset itself. If capital is to function as a public-forming institution, its operations must be intelligible enough that citizens can see how common-conditioned gains, public subsidies, or strategic investments are linked back to the social body. Here again, the point is not total politicization of all capital decisions in the narrow partisan sense. It is visible accountability for the way capital organizes collective futures.

This is the deeper sense in which impact finance must become a new institution rather than a branded niche. It must cease to mean simply "finance with values" and begin to mean finance embedded in an architecture of public return. The question is no longer whether some investors care about outcomes beyond yield. The question is whether societies can design systems in which those outcomes become endogenous to the logic of major capital formation itself.

Such a design may take many forms. Public-interest conditions can be attached to strategic

subsidies, large-scale innovation financing, or infrastructure concessions. Data- and platform-driven sectors may be required to contribute to common funds reflecting the common-conditioned nature of the value they monetize. Public research ecosystems can retain stronger claims on the downstream accessibility of commercially successful therapies and technologies. Territorial regeneration funds can be capitalized not as emergency afterthoughts but as standing vehicles tied to sectors whose reorganizations predictably generate local shock. Green-transition capital can be linked to place-based social resilience obligations so that ecological modernization does not simply reproduce sacrificial geographies under a cleaner discourse.

These examples all share a principle: capital should not meet the common world only after the fact, in the form of charitable correction. It should encounter the common world at the level of design. The social and territorial conditions of legitimacy must be built into financing architectures early enough that return and rein-

tegration are not treated as optional virtues but as structural criteria. This is particularly important in sectors where future asymmetries are likely to become severe—AI, biotechnology, energy transition, platform infrastructure, and strategic manufacturing among them.

At this point, one must return to the relation between finance and public happiness. Public happiness, as argued earlier, is not sentiment but the civil condition in which private initiative and collective flourishing remain sufficiently connected that prosperity does not turn into social disintegration. Finance matters here because it largely determines whether that connection can be institutionally sustained. If capital flows only toward what is rapidly extractable, then public happiness will appear perpetually downstream and underfunded. If, however, capital is partially organized around the maintenance of social intelligibility, territorial continuity, and temporal justice, then the economy's civil horizon becomes materially more plausible.

This is why impact finance must also be distinguished from ordinary ESG logic. ESG, in its strongest form, attempted to broaden the field of corporate and investment evaluation beyond immediate financial indicators. That ambition was not trivial. Yet in practice ESG has often suffered from metric inflation, conceptual inconsistency, performative compliance, and the temptation to collapse deep social questions into scoreable disclosure regimes. The result has been a language often too weak to govern structural tensions and too technical to rebuild legitimacy. Impact finance as a new institution must go further. It cannot be satisfied with reporting externalities more elegantly. It must participate in redesigning the circuits through which capital, risk, and return are distributed.

A related challenge concerns the role of the State. Here again two errors must be avoided. The first is to imagine that public institutions should simply retreat and allow enlightened private capital to fill the void. This leads back to philanthrocapitalism, with all its asymmetries.

The second is to imagine that the State alone can or should fully direct all strategic investment. In many societies, public institutions lack the flexibility, competence, or fiscal room for such total control, and attempts to impose it may produce sclerosis, politicized patronage, or strategic lag. What is needed instead are hybrid architectures in which public authority sets civil conditions, long-horizon priorities, and accountability frameworks, while capital—public, private, and mixed—operates within those conditions to generate resilient, innovation-capable, socially intelligible investment.

These hybrid forms are likely to become increasingly important. Sovereign social funds, transition vehicles, public-interest venture structures, common-data funds, health-access financing platforms, and territorially anchored regeneration vehicles all represent possible embodiments of a finance architecture no longer reducible either to laissez-faire allocation or to direct state command. Their legitimacy will depend on whether they can avoid two equal dan-

gers: capture by elite networks on the one hand, and bureaucratic inertness on the other. The governing challenge is therefore to design forms of capital both capable and answerable.

This design challenge is intensified by the temporal and biopolitical questions raised in the previous chapters. If healthy longevity, advanced healthcare, or life-extending innovation become major axes of inequality, then finance will play a decisive role in determining whether such technologies remain luxuries for premium strata or become progressively integrated into wider structures of citizenship. Pricing, licensing, investment strategy, public co-funding, research ownership, and health infrastructure capitalization will all matter. In that context, impact finance cannot remain content with "doing well by doing good." It must confront the harder question of whether it helps create a society in which future time itself is less radically privatized.

The same is true territorially. A great deal of resentment in contemporary societies is produ-

ced not only by inequality in the abstract, but by the repeated experience that capital arrives extractively and leaves without return. Plants open and close. Platforms scale and centralize. Logistics corridors intensify value flows while weakening local continuity. Ecological transition reshapes energy landscapes without always reinvesting in the communities most exposed. Finance as a public-forming institution would seek to interrupt this pattern. It would make return visible and rule-bound. It would create standing expectations that where capital draws heavily on common infrastructures, labor pools, data ecologies, or territorial resilience, some of the resulting gain must re-enter those contexts in durable form.

In this sense, finance becomes one of the practical languages of anti-sacrificial order. Earlier chapters argued that advanced societies are always tempted to preserve dynamism by concentrating vulnerability downward. A reformed finance architecture can counter that tendency only if it becomes one of the mechanisms

through which risk, value, and duration are rebalanced. That means more than compensating losses. It means financing conditions under which losses do not repeatedly fall on the same populations without visible return.

One may therefore summarize the chapter's core proposition as follows. The future of capitalism will not be decided only in factories, parliaments, laboratories, or digital platforms. It will also be decided in the forms through which capital learns—or refuses—to recognize that the common world is not an external residue but one of the sources of its own legitimacy. Where finance remains blind to this, impact discourse will continue to float above structural extraction. Where finance internalizes it, even imperfectly, a different kind of institutional order becomes thinkable.

This is the threshold beyond philanthrocapitalism. Beyond it lies not hostility to private wealth, nor the fantasy of a frictionless moral market, but a more exacting settlement in which capital is asked to become what it already is in

fact but too rarely in form: a political force shaping the distribution of future possibilities. The question is whether that force can be rendered publicly intelligible and civilly answerable.

A Capitalism of Meaning answers that it must. It must because no society can long endure if capital's most consequential powers remain detached from the work of returning value, recognition, and possibility to the social body. It must because trust cannot be rebuilt through rhetoric while investment architectures continue silently to reward abandonment. And it must because the coming century—defined by AI, biotechnology, ecological transition, demographic strain, and strategic rivalry—will require more than generous donors and ethically minded funds. It will require institutions of capital capable of underwriting a common future.

The argument of the book has now reached the point at which critique, genealogy, political economy, and institutional design begin to converge. What remains is to gather the threads and state, without euphemism, the choice that

stands before advanced societies. They can continue to oscillate between exhausted managerialism and selective technological sovereignty, allowing distrust, temporal inequality, and sacrificial transitions to deepen. Or they can begin the harder work of building an order in which truth, reciprocity, and return once again become constitutive of economic rationality itself. The conclusion turns to that choice.

CONCLUSION

THE TIME OF RECONCILIATION

A civilization is not judged only by the power it accumulates, the innovations it produces, or the crises it survives. It is judged also by whether it knows how to remain recognizable to those who inhabit it while it transforms. This book has argued that the deepest crisis of the present lies precisely here. We do not live merely in an age of inequality, nor merely in an age of technological acceleration, nor merely in an age of political fatigue. We live in an age in which the connection between transformation and recognizability has begun to break. Systems continue to function, and often function with extraordinary sophistication. Markets allocate. Platforms scale. States manage. Algorithms

classify. Finance anticipates. Biotechnologies advance. And yet, beneath this density of operation, a different experience spreads: distrust, opacity, humiliation, temporal fracture, territorial abandonment, and the sense that the future is being built in a language increasingly detached from the lives of those asked to endure it.

This fracture is what the book has named, from the outset, as a crisis of meaning. Not meaning in the weak sense of sentiment or moral ornament, but meaning as the condition through which power remains intelligible, sacrifice remains nameable, conflict remains politically traversable, and freedom remains more than the privilege of those best positioned to insulate themselves from dependence. Once meaning weakens, institutions do not simply become unpopular. They become normatively thinner. They continue to decide, but their decisions no longer appear attached to a believable account of why this order deserves continuity, for whom it is being maintained, and under what rules its gains and burdens return to the common world.

The chapters of this book have followed that fracture across multiple domains. They began with the global map of resentment, not to flatter grievance, but to show that distrust is often the dark perception of a system whose transformations no longer feel reciprocal. They then turned to elite diagnosis, through Peter Thiel and the broader technoright, to show that some of the sharpest interpreters of the present correctly perceive the exhaustion of old liberal forms while too often answering with selective sovereignty rather than common reconstruction. They moved through Girard to expose the mimetic depth of our disorder, showing that institutions fail not only when they are unjust, but when they cease to mediate desire, rivalry, and symbolic injury in ways that remain socially bearable. They confronted the algorithmic condition as a migration of sovereignty into infrastructure, the eclipse of teleological judgment by artificial reason, and the erosion of responsibility as an inhabitable burden. They recovered, through Genovesi, another modernity—one in which public happiness, reciprocity, and civil

economy still formed a single horizon. They translated that horizon into mechanism through the rent of the commons and the Systemic Social Dividend. They tested it against industrial trauma, then extended it into the frontier of long life, where mortality itself becomes politically and economically governable. Finally, they showed how the future of capitalism depends not only on law and politics, but on whether capital itself can be rendered answerable to public return.

Taken together, these arguments lead to one severe conclusion: the contemporary order is no longer sustainable on the basis of procedural efficiency and symbolic self-defense alone. The managerial grammar that has dominated much of late liberal modernity is exhausted. It can monitor, disclose, regulate, and communicate. It cannot, by itself, restore the bond between strategic transformation and public recognizability. This is why so many societies now oscillate between two inadequate responses. On one side stands exhausted managerialism: morally

performative, procedurally dense, strategically hesitant, and increasingly incapable of commanding trust. On the other side stands selective technological sovereignty: sharper in diagnosis, more serious about power and capacity, but too willing to let the future congeal around exceptional agency, infrastructural opacity, and asymmetric access to time, security, and exit.

Neither path is sufficient. The first has lost form. The second risks losing the common world. One preserves procedure while draining purpose. The other restores purpose for the few while weakening reciprocity for the many. A society that remains trapped between them will continue to produce the characteristic pathologies described throughout this book: resentment without reintegration, innovation without recognition, automation without answerability, wealth without common return, longevity without citizenship, and security without public trust.

The alternative proposed here is neither nostalgic nor utopian. It does not seek to return to

a pre-technological order, nor to suppress ambition, innovation, or strategic capability. It does not deny the need for institutions able to build, compete, decide, and act under conditions of geopolitical and technological pressure. But it insists that no civilization can call itself rational if it accelerates transformation while consuming the trust, cohesion, and temporal equality required for that transformation to remain politically inhabitable. The Capitalism of Meaning is therefore not an ethical supplement to capitalism. It is a demand that capitalism cease treating its own civil preconditions as expendable.

This is why the word reconciliation in the title of this conclusion must be understood precisely. Reconciliation does not mean the sentimental erasure of conflict. It does not mean social peace achieved through forgetting, nor the rhetorical smoothing of antagonisms that remain real. Reconciliation, in the sense relevant here, is institutional before it is emotional. It names the reconstruction of conditions under which truth, burden, and return are once again linked.

A society is reconciled not when conflict disappears, but when conflict no longer needs to be displaced onto invisible others, when transitions no longer arrive solely as injury, when sacrifice is not hidden behind inevitability, and when the gains of transformation visibly re-enter the social body that made them possible.

To reach such a condition requires three things that the present order too often separates. The first is truth. Not abstract truth, but civic truth: the willingness of institutions to say what their decisions cost, who bears those costs, what assumptions guide them, and where technical necessity ends and political choice begins. The second is reciprocity. Not generalized benevolence, but visible return: the principle that no system can indefinitely privatize gains while socializing risks and still expect legitimacy to endure. The third is form. Not bureaucracy for its own sake, but institutions capable of holding conflict, interruption, and judgment open long enough that societies do not stabilize themsel-

ves through procedural concealment or sacrificial simplification.

These three elements—truth, reciprocity, form—are the real infrastructure of reconciliation. Without truth, return becomes manipulation. Without reciprocity, capacity becomes extraction. Without form, good intentions dissolve into private discretion or political exhaustion. The four operational pillars outlined in the previous chapter were meant precisely to give these requirements institutional shape: democratic control over consequential systems of decision; a reordered settlement around work, contribution, and time; mechanisms of systemic social return; and infrastructures of inclusion capable of resisting sacrificial transition. Likewise, the rethinking of finance proposed thereafter aimed to show that even capital, if it is to remain politically legitimate, must be drawn into an order of visible responsibility.

One of the deepest errors of our age has been to imagine that the future can be made durable through intelligence alone—through more data,

more processing, more surveillance, more optimization, more strategic calculation. This is the fantasy that underlies both managerial complacency and technocratic ambition. But intelligence without reconciliation does not stabilize civilization. It merely equips it with more refined means of governing fracture. A society may become immensely capable of anticipating risk, classifying populations, and prolonging selected lives while becoming less and less able to justify why those powers are distributed as they are. The result is not wisdom. It is a more elegant form of estrangement.

This is why the Capitalism of Meaning must finally be understood as a politics of civilizational maturity. It asks whether advanced societies can become strong without becoming sacrificial, innovative without becoming blind, ambitious without becoming oligarchic, and technologically capable without making the future progressively less common. It asks whether economic rationality can be widened to include not only efficiency and growth, but the social reco-

gnizability of the order producing them. And it asks whether freedom can be rebuilt not as selective insulation, but as a form of shared viability across unequal yet still mutually answerable lives.

The stakes of these questions are no longer theoretical. They concern the actual trajectory of societies entering a period defined by artificial intelligence, demographic strain, ecological transition, geopolitical rivalry, and the first serious intimations of a biotechnological politics of time. In such a period, old distributive frameworks will prove too narrow. What is at issue is no longer only the distribution of income or opportunity within a stable world. It is the distribution of future, of legibility, of protection from being made expendable, of access to the common gains of transformation, and of the institutional means through which citizens remain participants rather than residues.

This is why the book began by speaking of an apocalyptic crossroads. The term was not meant theatrically. It was meant diagnostically.

Apocalypse, in its strongest sense, is revelation: the moment when what had been hidden becomes impossible not to see. What our age reveals is not simply the fragility of institutions, nor simply the power of technology, nor simply the greed of elites or the anger of publics. It reveals the unsustainability of any order that seeks to govern accelerated transformation while denying the civil grammar through which transformation must be made bearable. Once that grammar collapses, societies either drift into exhausted proceduralism or seek salvation in stronger asymmetries. Neither can produce a durable common future.

The time of reconciliation therefore names a task, not a mood. It calls for the rebuilding of the institutions, mechanisms, and languages through which a society can once again say to itself: what is being transformed here still belongs to us; what is being decided here is not hidden from us; what is being gained here will not leave us behind; what is being risked here will not always be borne by the same; and what

is being built here can still be recognized as part of a world we share.

Such a task is difficult precisely because it asks modern societies to recover something they have long treated as secondary: the truth that no order can endure if it consumes the conditions of its own legitimacy faster than it produces output. Trust cannot be endlessly extracted from populations whose losses remain unnamed. Territorial patience cannot be indefinitely demanded without visible reinvestment. Citizens cannot be asked to accept automation, ecological transition, strategic reorganization, and future biotechnological stratification unless the institutions governing these processes become more answerable, more reciprocal, and more capable of preserving common futurity.

For this reason, the final choice is stark. Societies may continue down the path on which they currently travel: allowing the future to be organized by a mixture of exhausted management and selective technological sovereignty, punctuated by resentment, periodic compensation,

and increasingly refined sacrificial mechanisms. Or they may begin the harder and more creative work of reconstructing the relation between innovation and legitimacy, between power and truth, between gain and return, between time and citizenship. The first path offers momentum without meaning. The second demands institutional imagination equal to the scale of the crisis.

This book has argued for the second path. It has done so not because reconciliation is easy, but because without it even the strongest systems become fragile. Civilizations do not fail only when they are defeated from outside. They also fail when they become unrecognizable from within. The task, then, is not merely to survive the future. It is to deserve it.

APPENDIX

PROPOSED LAW ON THE SOCIAL DIVIDEND

The following proposed law on the Social Dividend should be read as the first possible legislative translation of the paradigm developed in this volume, not as its complete and exhaustive form. It gives legal expression, in normative terms, to the essential core of the thesis advanced here: in an economy in which wealth is generated increasingly through common infrastructures, technological accumulation, data, systemic capital, and transformations that exceed what can be immediately attributed to individual labor alone, a portion of the value produced must return to the community in a visible, stable, and legally recognizable form.

From this perspective, the Social Dividend is not conceived as a merely assistance-based measure, nor as a simple compensatory cash transfer, but as a first institution of social participation, designed to make it visible, also at the democratic level, that the system does not merely extract value, but is also capable of returning it. The function of the legislative proposal attached here is precisely this: to offer a form of restitution that is legally practicable, constitutionally defensible, and financially governable. It must, however, be clarified that the theoretical model developed in this book is broader than its first legislative formulation. The Systemic Social Dividend, as it is conceived here, does not necessarily end with the sole dimension of direct individual monetary return, however decisive that dimension may be for its symbolic immediacy and civic recognizability. In a later phase of political and institutional maturation, it may also include further forms of systemic restitution, especially with regard to territories most exposed to automation, technological displacement, or productive restructuring, as well

as mechanisms of local reinvestment capable of rebuilding collective capacities, social infrastructures, and trust. For reasons of normative determinacy, financial sustainability, and parliamentary practicability, the legislative proposal reproduced here deliberately adopts a more limited form: it focuses on the individual component of the dividend, while leaving to the ordinary processes of political and democratic elaboration the task of assessing whether and how to introduce, at a later stage, a portion of the DSN Fund devoted to territories exposed to technological displacement, a specific section for local reinvestment, or a principle of double return — individual and territorial — more fully consistent with the systemic vision developed in this volume. For this reason, the proposed law should not be interpreted as a reduction of the theoretical paradigm, but as its first positive juridical formalization: an initial legislative threshold, coherent with the architecture of the book, though not yet coinciding with its full scope. It marks the point at which a broader vision enters into law without claiming to be ex-

hausted by it, and at which theory accepts becoming institution, while still leaving open the space of politics, democratic deliberation, and further normative development.

NATIONAL SOCIAL DIVIDEND (NSB)

A universal benefit of social participation grounded in the collective value of the digital economy

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM / LEGISLATIVE TEXT /

1. Background and Rationale

The advance of automation and digital technologies has profoundly transformed the labour market and the composition of national wealth. According to estimates from the Italian Digital Agenda, between 18% and 30% of the workforce is at risk of technological displacement in the medium term. At the same time, Italy has one of the oldest demographic profiles in the world (median age: 47 years), with rapid growth in the over-eighty population: centenarians increased by 130% between 2009 and 2025 (ISTAT).

Against this backdrop, the National Social Dividend (NSB) is conceived as a structural response: not a means-tested subsidy for the most vulnerable, but a universal benefit of social participation that recognises each citizen's share of the collective value generated by technological innovation and the intangible public heritage. The NSB is clearly distinct from the Reddito di Cittadinanza – conditional, household-based, and stigmatising – and draws inspiration from Basic Income models piloted in Finland, the Netherlands and Kenya, as well as the theoretical proposals of Meade, Tobin and Van Parijs.

This Bill is prepared for parliamentary filing by December 2027, with first application during the year 2028. The text is designed to be self-financing for the first application, without dependence on future or uncertain legislative measures.

2. Legal Nature: Universal Benefit of Social Participation

The NSB is classified as a "universal benefit of social participation" (prestazione universale di

partecipazione sociale), constituting a concrete expression of the principle of substantive equality (Art. 3 of the Constitution) and of the social function of economic activity (Art. 41 of the Constitution). This definition deliberately replaces purely negative formulations with a qualification positively anchored to specific constitutional provisions. The NSB is coordinated with the existing system of social and welfare benefits, without duplicating or impairing their essential standards.

The NSB has an individual, continuous and inalienable character – features typical of a subjective right – but is exercisable within the limits and conditions laid down by law, in accordance with the fiscal balance constraint of Art. 81 of the Constitution. This formulation, already endorsed by the Constitutional Court as necessary in the field of social security (Judgment No. 264/2012), reflects a choice of legal robustness, not a limitation of the political vision underlying the measure.

3. Constitutional Foundations

The measure is grounded in the following principles of the Italian Constitution:

a) Art. 2: duty of economic and social solidarity;

b) Art. 3(2): the duty of the Republic to remove the economic obstacles that limit the full development of the individual;

c) Art. 4: promotion of conditions that make the right to free and dignified work effective – the NSB eliminates the poverty trap inherent in conditional subsidies;

d) Art. 38: right of elderly and incapacitated persons to the means necessary for their subsistence;

e) Art. 41: social function of the economy – the NSB redistributes part of the fruits of the digital economy to the community.

The constraint of Art. 81 of the Constitution is addressed through three safeguards: (i) a dedicated NSB Fund with specific and ring-fenced revenue sources; (ii) an automatic proportional reduction clause in the event of Fund shortfall; (iii) a legal conditionality requiring a favourable

RGS opinion and a specific act of Parliament for any expansion of the beneficiary pool.

4. Principle of Presumptively Active Disbursement

The NSB is activated automatically for every individual who, on the basis of data held in the National Population Register (ANPR) and the INPS databases, is found to satisfy the statutory eligibility requirements, without the need for an application, claim or prior self-declaration. This principle aims to eliminate non-take-up – historically affecting 20–30% of the theoretical beneficiary pool of conditional Italian benefits (INPS Annual Report, 2023) – by transferring the burden of verification from the beneficiary to the State rather than the other way around. Presumptive disbursement is accompanied by automated quarterly ex-post checks.

5. Approach to Financing and Scenarios

The full-regime cost – approximately 46 million adult beneficiaries at €500/month – is of the order of €276 billion per year. This figure

cannot be financed from currently available sources, and the text makes no pretence to the contrary. The Bill manages this gap through a strategy of three strictly conditioned phases.

First Application (year 2028): €300/month, restricted beneficiary pool (3–5 million persons among elderly aged ≥75, NEET youth aged 18–29 and long-term unemployed), estimated annual cost €11–18 billion. This phase is entirely financed from the sources listed in Art. 6(2), without dependence on future measures.

Phase 2 – Expansion (2029): up to €500/month, approximately 15–20 million beneficiaries, estimated cost ~€90–120 billion. This phase requires a dedicated act of Parliament with a favourable RGS opinion and, in all likelihood, the enactment of structural tax reform. A moderate progressive wealth tax (e.g. 0.5% on net assets above €500,000) represents the most appropriate source for this phase: if enacted by separate legislation by 2028–2029, its revenues shall flow into the NSB Fund. The Government undertakes to submit such a pro-

posal together with the 2029 Budget Bill (Art. 6(7)).

Phase 3 – Full Regime (2030–2031): universalisation to the entire adult resident population. Requires structural tax reform validated by the RGS; not automatic. This constitutes the programmatic objective of the measure.

⚠ Each phase transition is conditional upon a specific act of Parliament accompanied by a favourable RGS opinion (Arts. 6(5) and 8(4)). In the absence of certified coverage, any expansion is suspended by operation of law.

6. Role of the Court of Auditors and Financial Governance

The Bill confers on the Court of Auditors (Corte dei Conti) an explicit financial supervisory role over the NSB Fund, in addition to the internal Monitoring Committee (Art. 9). The Court monitors the annual balance between Fund revenues and expenditure and has the power to report material shortfalls to Parliament and to prescribe the necessary corrective measures. This dual-oversight architecture –

internal Committee plus Court of Auditors – responds to the constitutional case-law requiring effective control mechanisms over structural expenditure measures.

7. Coordination with the Existing Welfare System and the Universal Child Allowance

The NSB supplements existing benefits without replacing them. In particular, the supplementary amounts for dependent children (Art. 4(3)(d)) are conceived as additional family allowances. Where a beneficiary already receives the Universal Child Allowance (Assegno Unico e Universale), INPS coordinates the benefits pursuant to Art. 5(5), ensuring that the beneficiary receives the overall most favourable treatment and avoiding duplications. No automatic reduction of the Universal Child Allowance shall arise as a result of the NSB.

8. Institutional Communication and Reduction of Stigma

The narrative of the NSB as a "universal benefit of social participation" is essential for di-

stinguishing it from conditional subsidies and preventing the stigmatisation phenomena that have historically reduced take-up of welfare measures. Pursuant to Art. 10, the Ministry of Labour is tasked with preparing a wide-reaching public information campaign – also through local authorities and employment centres – explaining the universal and non-stigmatising nature of the NSB as a benefit of social participation, with particular attention to population groups with limited digital access.

9. Foreseeable Amendments and Responses

Increase in the base amount: admissible with a corresponding increase in NSB Fund revenues.

Age-based modulation: admissible, falls within the ministerial delegation on supplementary amounts.

Exclusion of high incomes (>€150k): technically problematic under Art. 3 of the Constitution; preferable to apply progressive income taxation to the NSB, which produces the same distributive effect without formal discrimination.

Annual expenditure caps: admissible as an amendment to Art. 6; already partially covered by the automatic reduction clause.

Alternative funding sources (RAI licence fee, CDP profits, asset disposals): admissible as supplements to the NSB Fund, to be quantified in an RGS technical opinion.

Revision of the supplementary amounts cap: the current text adopts an absolute monetary ceiling (€200), which is more transparent than a percentage limit and independent of indexation of the base amount; reviewable by Parliament every three years on the basis of Monitoring Committee reports.

LEGISLATIVE TEXT

Art. 1 – Subject Matter and Definitions

1. This Act establishes the National Social Dividend (hereinafter: NSB), as a universal individual patrimonial benefit of social participation, disbursed by the State to eligible persons within the limits and subject to the conditions laid down in this Act.

2. For the purposes of this Act, the following definitions apply:

a) "NSB": the National Social Dividend referred to in paragraph 1;

b) "beneficiary": any natural person satisfying the eligibility requirements set out in Art. 3 who receives the NSB within the limits of the resources of the Fund referred to in Art. 6;

c) "elderly person": a person aged 65 years or over, within the meaning of Legislative Decree No. 29/2024;

d) "very elderly person": a person aged 80 years or over, within the meaning of Legislative Decree No. 29/2024;

e) "base amount": the monthly amount of the NSB as determined pursuant to Art. 4;

f) "NSB Fund": the fund established pursuant to Art. 6 in the estimates of the Ministry of Economy and Finance;

g) "INPS": the National Social Security Institute (Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale), the body administering the measure;

h) "ANPR": the National Population Register (Anagrafe Nazionale della Popolazione Resi-

dente);

i) "first application": the period from 1 January 2028 to 31 December 2028, as referred to in Art. 8;

l) "presumptively active disbursement": the mechanism referred to in Art. 7(2), whereby the NSB is activated automatically upon fulfilment of the eligibility requirements, without any application by the beneficiary.

Art. 2 – Establishment and Legal Nature

1. The National Social Dividend is hereby established as a universal benefit of social participation, grounded in the principle of substantive equality (Art. 3 of the Constitution) and the social function of economic activity (Art. 41 of the Constitution), recognising in each beneficiary a share of the collective value generated by technological innovation and the public heritage.

2. The NSB constitutes a subjective right of the beneficiary, exercisable within the limits and subject to the conditions laid down in this Act and subject to the availability of resources in the

NSB Fund. The quantum of the benefit is determined on the basis of the financial availability of the Fund, in compliance with Art. 81 of the Constitution.

3. The NSB is a universal benefit of social participation coordinated with the existing system of social and welfare benefits. It is disbursed without any employment conditionality and without a means test. It is not included in the calculation of the Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE) and does not contribute to taxable income for purposes of personal income tax (IRPEF), regional business tax (IRAP) or any other direct tax.

4. The NSB shall not be subject to enforcement proceedings, assignment or seizure, save for recovery procedures in respect of sums unduly received as referred to in Art. 7(5).

5. Administrative management of the NSB is entrusted to INPS, acting in coordination with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the State Accounting Office (RGS) and the competent territorial bodies.

Art. 3 – Beneficiaries and Eligibility Requirements

1. The following natural persons shall be entitled to the NSB, within the limits set out in Art. 2(2), provided they cumulatively satisfy the following requirements:

a) Italian citizenship, or long-term EU residence permit (permesso di soggiorno UE per soggiornanti di lungo periodo) pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 286/1998 as amended, or an EC residence permit with at least five years of continuous lawful residence in Italy;

b) registered residence in Italy for at least twenty-four continuous months, as certified by the ANPR;

c) age of at least eighteen years, subject to the provisions of paragraph 4.

2. The following persons shall be excluded from the benefit:

a) persons serving a custodial sentence, for the duration thereof;

b) persons in receipt of an equivalent universal benefit disbursed by another State, for the

period of such receipt.

3. European Union citizens resident in Italy for at least twenty-four continuous months shall be treated as Italian citizens for the purposes of this Act.

4. The NSB may be disbursed in respect of persons under the age of eighteen, at a rate not exceeding 50% of the base amount, as an additional family allowance payable to the parents or legal guardians, by decree of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, issued within one hundred and eighty days of the entry into force of this Act.

5. Verification of eligibility requirements shall be carried out by automated cross-checks against ANPR data and INPS databases, in accordance with the principle of presumptively active disbursement set out in Art. 7(2).

Art. 4 – Amount and Indexation

1. The monthly base amount of the NSB is set, for the first application (year 2028), at EUR 300 (three hundred). With effect from 1 January 2029, and subject to verification of full financial

coverage pursuant to Art. 6(5) and parliamentary approval pursuant to Art. 8(4), the base amount may be raised to up to EUR 500 (five hundred) per month by decree of the President of the Council of Ministers, on the proposal of the Minister of Economy, following a favourable opinion of the State Accounting Office (RGS).

2. The base amount shall be adjusted annually with effect from 1 January, by an amount equal to the change in the ISTAT consumer price index for workers and clerical staff (FOI) recorded in the preceding year. Parliament may, by legislation, replace the indexation parameter with GDP per capita, where this is more favourable to beneficiaries.

3. The following monthly supplementary amounts are available, cumulable within the ceiling set out in paragraph 4:

a) EUR 100 for elderly persons (aged ≥65) with certified functional dependency;

b) EUR 150 for very elderly persons (aged ≥80) with certified functional dependency;

c) EUR 80 for persons with severe disability as assessed pursuant to Law No. 104/1992;

d) EUR 60 for each dependent minor child, up to a maximum of two children.

4. The cumulative ceiling on supplementary amounts shall not exceed EUR 200 (two hundred) per month, irrespective of the base amount in force. This ceiling applies also where several conditions referred to in paragraph 3 are simultaneously met. Parliament may, by legislation, review the ceiling every three years on the basis of Monitoring Committee reports pursuant to Art. 9.

5. In the event of activation of the reduction clause set out in Art. 6(6), the base amount and supplementary amounts shall be reduced proportionally until the balance of the NSB Fund is restored. The reduction shall be applied with priority regard to the protection of beneficiaries in the lowest income deciles.

Art. 5 – Compatibility with Other Benefits and Tax Provisions

1. The NSB is compatible with any pension, social security or welfare benefit already received by the beneficiary. It shall not give rise to the reduction, suspension or revocation of any other social benefit.

2. The NSB shall not contribute to taxable income for purposes of personal income tax (IRPEF) and shall not be relevant for purposes of the ISEE means test.

3. INPS shall coordinate the NSB with existing income-support benefits through automated cross-checks, in order to avoid duplications, guaranteeing in all cases the principle of non-deterioration of the beneficiary's position. Operational modalities shall be determined by Prime Ministerial Decree (DPCM) within ninety days of the entry into force of this Act. The DPCM shall not suspend, reduce or make conditional any benefit already recognised to the beneficiary under applicable legislation, nor adversely affect the subjective rights arising therefrom.

4. Beneficiaries already in receipt of the Reddito di Cittadinanza or an equivalent conditio-

nal measure shall automatically transition to the NSB upon expiry of the relevant benefit, without interruption of payments.

5. INPS shall ex officio coordinate the NSB with existing benefits and the Universal Child Allowance (Assegno Unico e Universale), ensuring that the beneficiary receives the overall most favourable treatment and avoiding duplications. The beneficiary shall be notified in writing of the effects of the NSB on their overall benefit position within thirty days of the commencement of disbursement.

Art. 6 – Financing and the NSB Fund

1. The expenditure arising from this Act shall be financed through the establishment, in the estimates of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, of the National Social Dividend Fund (NSB Fund). Fund resources shall be used exclusively for the financing of the NSB.

2. The NSB Fund shall be resourced from the following revenues, all of which shall be fully governed by the 2028 Budget Law simultaneously with the enactment of this Act:

a) proceeds of the Financial Transaction Tax on equity transactions and derivative instruments;

b) revenue from taxation of digital financial income and large-scale digital services;

c) a portion of the revenue from a surcharged VAT rate on luxury goods, at the rate set by the Budget Law;

d) resources derived from the rationalisation and consolidation of redundant social benefits, identified by ministerial decree of the Minister of Labour;

e) any EU co-financing contributions (ESF+, REACT-EU, PNRR) for the first application only, on a non-structural basis.

3. The annual Budget Law shall determine the allocation of the NSB Fund for the reference year and the two following years, specifying the rates and taxable bases for each source set out in paragraph 2, in accordance with the financing scenario adopted by Parliament from those set out in Annex A. Coverage must be full and may not be predicated on uncertain or future revenue items.

4. The Minister of Economy and Finance shall submit to Parliament, by 30 September each year, a report on the sustainability of the NSB Fund for the following three years, accompanied by the opinion of the State Accounting Office (RGS) and the report of the Court of Auditors.

5. Any expansion of the beneficiary pool beyond the levels of the first application is conditional upon verification by the State Accounting Office (RGS) of full coverage of the new financial obligations. In the absence of a positive verification, the expansion shall be suspended by operation of law and the base amount shall remain at the level of the first application.

6. Should the resources of the NSB Fund be or be projected to be insufficient during the year, the Ministry of Economy and Finance – on notification by the State Accounting Office (RGS) or the Court of Auditors – shall, by reasoned decree communicated to Parliament with at least sixty days' notice, order a proportional reduction of the base amount and supplementary amounts until the Fund balance is restored. The

reduction shall not exceed 20% of the amount in force in any single financial year. The Government shall also be required to submit simultaneously to Parliament the corrective measures necessary to restore the structural balance of the Fund. Should the NSB Fund show a positive balance for at least two consecutive financial years following the reduction, the base amount shall be automatically restored to the pre-reduction level with effect from 1 January of the year following the second positive year, without the need for any further legislative act.

7. The Government undertakes to submit to Parliament, simultaneously with the 2029 Budget Bill, a Bill for tax reform identifying structural financing sources for Phase 2 of the NSB. If enacted, the revenue from the new sources shall flow into the NSB Fund through an amendment to the Budget Law.

Art. 7 – Disbursement and Administrative Management

1. INPS shall disburse the NSB monthly, by the fifteenth of each month, by direct credit to

the beneficiary's bank or post office account. Beneficiaries without a bank account shall be issued, free of charge, a dedicated electronic payment card. Access shall be guaranteed through physical INPS service points for beneficiaries with limited digital capability, with particular regard to very elderly persons.

2. The NSB shall be activated on a presumptive and automatic basis – without application, claim or prior self-declaration – for every individual who, on the basis of ANPR data and INPS databases, is found to satisfy the eligibility requirements set out in Art. 3. Changes in residence, civil status, citizenship or employment status relevant to NSB eligibility shall be communicated ex officio by the ANPR to INPS.

3. INPS shall carry out, on a quarterly basis, automated cross-checks against data held by the Revenue Agency (Agenzia delle Entrate), the tax register, the Ministry of the Interior and EU databases, in order to verify the continuing fulfilment of eligibility requirements and to prevent undue receipt of the benefit.

4. Where the original or subsequent absence of eligibility requirements is established, the NSB shall be immediately suspended. Sums unduly received shall be recovered by INPS with the addition of statutory interest. The beneficiary's right to be heard shall be guaranteed before any final revocation, save in cases of manifest documentary fraud.

5. False statements made for the purpose of accessing the NSB – including false attestations of residence, civil status or employment status – shall be punishable pursuant to Arts. 483 and 640-bis of the Criminal Code and Art. 76 of Presidential Decree No. 445/2000. A conviction shall entail the permanent forfeiture of the benefit and the obligation to repay in full all sums received, increased by fifty per cent.

6. The databases of INPS, the Revenue Agency, ANPAL and the Ministry of the Interior shall be coordinated for fraud prevention purposes. INPS shall report anomalies to the National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) and the Financial Police (Guardia di Finanza). NSB expenditure data shall be published annually in the Sta-

te budget and analysed by the Court of Auditors.

7. For beneficiaries aged 80 years or over, access to the NSB shall be integrated with the single-desk service for elderly persons provided for in Legislative Decree No. 29/2024. A Social Dividend Hub shall be established within INPS for the coordination of services for non-self-sufficient elderly persons.

Art. 8 – First Application and Transitional Arrangements

1. The NSB shall be introduced through a first application corresponding to the year 2028 (the period from 1 January 2028 to 31 December 2028), during which it shall be disbursed at EUR 300 per month to a restricted beneficiary pool, identified by Prime Ministerial Decree (DPCM), from among:

a) residents in one or more pilot regions, following agreement at the State-Regions Conference;

b) specific beneficiary groups: elderly persons aged ≥75, NEET youth aged 18–29, long-term

unemployed (>24 months);

c) both modalities referred to in points a) and b).

2. The monthly amount for the first application is set at EUR 300 and may not be reduced below EUR 250, save upon activation of the clause set out in Art. 6(6).

3. By 31 December 2028, the Government shall submit to Parliament a technical evaluation report on the first application, prepared by the Monitoring Committee with the support of the State Accounting Office (RGS), containing:

a) data on the actual beneficiary pool reached, average amount disbursed and take-up rate;

b) impact on absolute and relative poverty (ISTAT indicators);

c) effects on employment and labour market transitions of beneficiaries;

d) assessment of financial sustainability and a proposed financing mix for Phase 2, indicating the Annex A scenario recommended by the RGS;

e) report of the Court of Auditors on the balance of the NSB Fund.

4. By 30 June 2029, Parliament shall, by a dedicated Act and following a favourable opinion of the State Accounting Office (RGS), approve any extension of the NSB (Phase 2). In the absence of parliamentary approval or a favourable RGS opinion, the NSB shall continue to operate solely at the levels of the first application.

5. The universalisation of the NSB to the entire adult resident population (Phase 3) constitutes the programmatic objective of the measure from 2030, subject to the adoption of structural tax reform validated by the State Accounting Office (RGS) and enacted by Parliament through a separate Act. Should the financial conditions (debt/GDP ratio, primary balance) deteriorate relative to projections, Parliament may redefine the scope, amount and duration of the benefit.

Art. 9 – Monitoring, Evaluation and the Court of Auditors

1. The Government shall establish, within ninety days of the entry into force of this Act, a DSN Monitoring Committee, chaired by the

President of INPS and composed of representatives of: the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), the Ministry of Labour, ISTAT, the Bank of Italy, the Revenue Agency, the State Accounting Office (RGS) and the social partners (CGIL, CISL, UIL, Confindustria).

2. The Committee shall publish, on a biennial basis, an evaluation report on the effects of the NSB containing at least: absolute and relative poverty rates (ISTAT); Gini coefficient; employment rate by age group and gender; effective coverage index of the beneficiary pool; financial sustainability of the NSB Fund; effects on inflation and domestic demand.

3. The Court of Auditors shall exercise control over the management of the NSB Fund pursuant to Art. 3 of Law No. 20 of 14 January 1994. It shall submit annually to Parliament a report on the financial balance of the NSB, with power to prescribe corrective measures and to report material shortfalls pursuant to Art. 6(6).

4. The first Committee report shall be submitted to Parliament by 31 December 2028. The first Court of Auditors report shall be submitted

by 30 June 2028. Subsequent reports and audit opinions shall be submitted on a biennial basis.

5. This Act shall be subject to triennial review. The first review shall be conducted by 31 December 2030, on the basis of the Committee report and the Court of Auditors' audit opinion.

Art. 10 – Support Measures and Institutional Communication

1. By decree of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, issued within one hundred and eighty days of the commencement of the first application, support programmes shall be established for NSB beneficiaries, aimed at: promoting access to vocational training and reskilling pathways through complementary vouchers; ensuring digital literacy among elderly beneficiaries (PNRR objectives); supporting labour market guidance through employment centres, without any element of compulsion.

2. The NSB shall in no circumstances be made conditional upon participation in the support programmes referred to in paragraph 1.

3. A coordination forum shall be established within the Ministry of Labour, bringing together INPS, ANPAL, Regions and Municipalities, for the integration of support programmes with existing active labour market policies, in coordination with the Workers' Employability Guarantee programme (GOL) and PNRR-funded measures.

4. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy shall promote, within ninety days of the commencement of the first application, a wide-reaching institutional public information campaign on the universal and non-stigmatising nature of the NSB as a benefit of social participation, making use of Municipalities, employment centres and INPS service points. The campaign shall be designed with particular regard to population groups with limited digital access.

Art. 11 – Regulatory Coordination and Final Provisions

1. Within ninety days of the date of entry into force of this Act, the President of the Council of Ministers shall, on the proposal of the Minister

of Labour and Social Policy and in agreement with the Minister of Economy and Finance, adopt the Prime Ministerial Decrees (DPCM) necessary for the operation of the NSB, in respect of: (a) the technical modalities for activating presumptively active disbursement and for interoperability between the ANPR and INPS databases; (b) the procedures for suspension, revocation and recovery of sums unduly received; (c) the templates for communications to beneficiaries. The said acts shall not have the nature of regulatory measures (regolamenti) and may not adversely affect the subjective rights recognised by this Act.

2. Without prejudice to the essential levels of social assistance (Art. 117 of the Constitution), the provisions of this Act shall prevail over incompatible provisions of equivalent rank and may not be derogated from by regional legislation.

3. The provisions of this Act shall apply in compliance with European Union law on freedom of movement. The Government shall notify the European Commission of the scheme,

where required under Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, prior to the commencement of the first application.

4. This Act shall enter into force on the day following its publication in the Official Gazette of the Italian Republic (Gazzetta Ufficiale). The first application shall commence on 1 January 2028 or, if later, within ninety days of the publication of the implementing decrees referred to in paragraph 1.

Annex A – Financing Scenarios for the NSB Fund

The annual Budget Law shall adopt one of the following financing scenarios, or a combination thereof, specifying for each source the applicable rates and taxable bases. The amounts are indicative estimates; definitive figures shall be determined by the State Accounting Office (Ragioneria Generale dello Stato – RGS).

The sources listed correspond exclusively to those set out in Art. 6(2) of the legislative text, which are self-sufficient for the first application. Any progressive wealth tax, if enacted by a se-

parate act during 2028–2029, shall flow into the NSB Fund through a dedicated amendment to the Budget Law, increasing resources available for Phase 2.

Prudent Scenario

Financial Transaction Tax: 0.2% → approximately €5bn

Tax on digital financial income: approximately €5bn

VAT surcharge on luxury goods: +1 percentage point → approximately €5bn

Rationalisation of social expenditure: approximately €10bn

EU co-financing (first application only): €0

Total estimated: approximately €25bn/year

Phase covered: first application only (€300)

Balanced Scenario

Financial Transaction Tax: 0.3% → approximately €8bn

Tax on digital financial income: approximately €8bn

VAT surcharge on luxury goods: +2 percentage points → approximately €10bn

Rationalisation of social expenditure: approximately €15bn

EU co-financing (first application only): approximately €5bn

Total estimated: approximately €46bn/year

Phase covered: first application covered

Ambitious Scenario

Financial Transaction Tax: 0.5% → approximately €15bn

Tax on digital financial income: approximately €12bn

VAT surcharge on luxury goods: +3 percentage points → approximately €15bn

Rationalisation of social expenditure: approximately €20bn

EU co-financing (first application only): approximately €10bn

Total estimated: approximately €72bn/year

Phase covered: first application plus partial expansion

Transitional Scenario

Financial Transaction Tax: 0.3% → approximately €8bn

Tax on digital financial income: approximately €7bn

VAT surcharge on luxury goods: +2 percentage points → approximately €10bn

Rationalisation of social expenditure: approximately €10bn

EU co-financing (first application only): approximately €20bn (PNRR)

Total estimated: approximately €55bn/year

Phase covered: first application with EU support

Notes on the revenue sources

Financial Transaction Tax: high cyclical volatility.

Tax on digital financial income: growing yield.

VAT surcharge on luxury goods: stable yield.

Rationalisation of social expenditure: INPS mapping required.

EU co-financing: non-structural.

Warning: the Prudent Scenario (approximately €25bn/year) is sufficient to cover the first application (year 2028, estimated cost approximately €11–18bn) without recourse to additional measures. Any expansion of the beneficiary pool requires a specific act of Parliament accompanied by a favourable RGS opinion.

The full-regime cost of universalisation (approximately €276bn/year) cannot be financed from the sources listed in this Annex alone. That objective is programmatic in nature and is conditional upon separate structural tax reforms to be enacted by Parliament in phases 2029–2031, as set out in Art. 8(5). This transparency is a deliberate choice of financial honesty.

Annex B – Redistributive and Macroeconomic Impact

Under the progressive personal income tax (IRPEF) system, the net benefit of the NSB decreases as income rises: higher deciles largely self-finance their own share. The net effect is

structurally progressive despite the nominally uniform nature of the transfer.

Illustrative redistributive effect by income decile

1st decile
Current net income: €4,200/year
Gross NSB: +€6,000/year
Estimated additional income tax: approximately €300
Net NSB benefit: +€5,700/year (about +136%)

2nd decile
Current net income: €8,500/year
Gross NSB: +€6,000/year
Estimated additional income tax: approximately €600
Net NSB benefit: +€5,400/year (about +64%)

3rd decile
Current net income: €12,000/year
Gross NSB: +€6,000/year
Estimated additional income tax: approximately €900
Net NSB benefit: +€5,100/year (about +43%)

5th decile

Current net income: €18,000/year

Gross NSB: +€6,000/year

Estimated additional income tax: approximately €1,500

Net NSB benefit: +€4,500/year (about +25%)

7th decile

Current net income: €28,000/year

Gross NSB: +€6,000/year

Estimated additional income tax: approximately €2,400

Net NSB benefit: +€3,600/year (about +13%)

9th decile

Current net income: €48,000/year

Gross NSB: +€6,000/year

Estimated additional income tax: approximately €3,600

Net NSB benefit: +€2,400/year (about +5%)

10th decile

Current net income: €85,000+ / year

Gross NSB: +€6,000/year

Estimated additional income tax: approximately €5,000+

Net NSB benefit: +€1,000/year (about +1%)

Expected reduction in the Gini coefficient: 4–7 percentage points, according to the international literature on comparable UBI programmes. Estimated reduction in absolute poverty: 60–80% of the current ISTAT poverty population (more than 5 million people). Estimated Keynesian multiplier on domestic demand: 1.2–1.5 for the component concentrated in deciles 1–5.

Annex C – Legislative and Implementation Timeline

2027 H1–H2: Parliamentary proceedings and filing

Required actions: filing of the Bill by December 2027; parliamentary hearings; RGS technical opinion; enactment of the 2028 Budget Law establishing the NSB Fund and setting the rates for the sources listed in Art. 6.

Binding conditions for advancement: parliamentary approval, positive RGS opinion, and 2028 Budget Law with full coverage of the first application.

2028 H1: Implementing decrees

Required actions: Prime Ministerial Decrees (DPCM) on the first application (year 2028), defining the beneficiary pool and modalities; activation of the INPS presumptive platform; EU notification; establishment of the Monitoring Committee.

Binding condition for advancement: implementing decrees issued within 90 days of publication of the Act.

Year 2028: First application

Required actions: presumptively active disbursement at €300/month; quarterly INPS cross-checks; first Court of Auditors report (June 2028); Monitoring Committee report (December 2028); possible commencement of structural tax reform proceedings in Parliament.

Binding condition for advancement: full NSB Fund coverage confirmed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance; restricted beneficiary pool as provided in Art. 8.

January–June 2029: Expansion Act (Phase 2)

Required actions: parliamentary Act for Phase 2 (by 30 June 2029); RGS opinion on coverage; possible increase of the base amount up to €500/month; selection of the financing scenario from Annex A; channelling of any new tax revenues into the NSB Fund.

Binding condition for advancement: favourable RGS opinion on Phase 2 coverage and enactment of structural tax reform or an equivalent measure.

2029–2030: Progressive expansion

Required actions: expansion of the beneficiary pool; second Monitoring Committee report; second Court of Auditors report.

Binding condition for advancement: enactment of structural tax reform by Parliament.

2030–2031: Full regime and triennial review

Required actions: pursuit of the universalisation objective; triennial review by December 2030; third Court of Auditors report.

Binding condition for advancement: RGS verification of full coverage and compatibility

with macroeconomic conditions, including the debt/GDP ratio.

Annex D – Multi-Year Simulation (Balanced Scenario)

Year 2028 – First application

Beneficiaries: 3–5 million
Base amount: €300/month
Estimated NSB cost: €11–18bn
Estimated Fund revenue: approximately €25–55bn
Balance / coverage: positive

Year 2029 – Expansion

Beneficiaries: 15–20 million
Base amount: up to €500/month
Estimated NSB cost: €90–120bn
Estimated Fund revenue: approximately €46–70bn
Balance / coverage: specific act required

Year 2030 – Expansion

Beneficiaries: 30–35 million

Base amount: up to €500/month

Estimated NSB cost: €180–210bn

Estimated Fund revenue: approximately €70–90bn

Balance / coverage: tax reform required

Year 2031 – Full regime

Beneficiaries: 40–46 million

Base amount: up to €500/month

Estimated NSB cost: €240–276bn

Estimated Fund revenue: approximately €90–276bn

Balance / coverage: structural reform required

* Year 2028: wide range because the balanced scenario may include EU funds (approximately €20bn), which are non-structural.

** Phases 2029–2031 require a specific act of Parliament with a favourable RGS opinion pursuant to Arts. 6(5) and 8(4). They are not automatic.

*** Estimate inclusive of potential new structural tax revenues (for example, income tax reform or a moderate wealth tax) to be enacted se-

parately. Without such reforms, expansion is not financeable.

AFTERWORD: THE FIRST THRESHOLD

On the Distance Between Paradigm and Law, and Why That Distance Is Deliberate

A book that proposes an institutional architecture has an obligation its purely theoretical counterparts do not share: it must be honest about the gap between what it argues and what it enacts. This afterword exists to honour that obligation.

The legislative proposal contained in the Appendix — the National Social Dividend (NSB) — is the first positive juridical formalization of the paradigm developed in this volume. It is not its complete expression. The distance between the two is real, it is significant, and it is deliberate. Understanding why that distance exists, what it costs, and what it points toward is, I believe, as important as understanding the proposal itself.

I. What the Law Does — and What It Does Not

The NSB proposal does several things that matter. It establishes a universal benefit of social participation grounded not in need but in membership — in the recognition that citizens are implicit co-producers of the conditions that make large-scale value accumulation possible. It introduces the principle of presumptively active disbursement, transferring the burden of verification from the vulnerable to the State. It creates a dedicated Fund with ring-fenced revenue sources, an automatic reduction clause, and dual oversight by both an internal Monitoring Committee and the Court of Auditors. And it structures a phased architecture that is honest about what it cannot yet finance, rather than concealing fiscal gaps behind programmatic ambition.

These are not trivial achievements in the language of legislation. The history of social policy is littered with reforms that promised transformation and delivered stigmatizing conditionality, or that promised universalism and produced means-tested residualism. The NSB is designed to avoid both traps.

But it does not do two things that the theoretical paradigm of this book requires.

It does not directly tax the companies — Google, Meta, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and their structural equivalents in logistics, finance, and biomedical data — whose extraordinary returns depend most visibly on the common conditions this book has described: public research ecosystems, shared digital infrastructure, legally guaranteed interoperability, the behavioral traces of millions of lives, and the civic trust that makes platforms socially viable in the first place. The financing sources of the NSB — a financial transaction tax, levies on digital financial income, a VAT surcharge on luxury goods, rationalization of redundant social expenditures — are legitimate and technically defensible. But they are not the same as capturing the rent of the digital commons at its source. They redistribute; they do not reattribute.

And the proposal does not yet give institutional form to what the book calls territorial return — the principle that communities disproportionately exposed to systemic disruption have a

standing claim not only to individual transfers but to place-based reinvestment: schools, healthcare systems, digital public infrastructure, vocational institutions, long-horizon regional regeneration. The Appendix acknowledges this openly, noting that a "double return" — individual and territorial — represents the fuller vision, while deferring it to subsequent phases of political elaboration. But deferral without architecture is a promise, not a plan.

II. Why the Gap Is Deliberate

The honest answer is that a legislative proposal capable of direct parliamentary filing in Italy by December 2027 cannot do everything the paradigm demands. This is not an apology. It is a structural constraint that any serious political project must navigate.

A proposal that explicitly levied a data-rent tax on Google and Meta at the national level would face immediate challenges under EU competition law, State aid rules, and the digital services frameworks currently under negotiation at the European level. It would be constitu-

tionally contestable, politically isolated, and almost certainly referred to the Constitutional Court before its first disbursement. A proposal that mandated place-based territorial reinvestment funds without a European co-financing architecture would be fiscally unsustainable within Italy's current debt-to-GDP constraints and primary balance obligations. These are not bureaucratic objections. They are the actual terrain on which legislation lives or dies.

The first threshold has to be crossable. If it is not crossable, it is not a threshold — it is a declaration of intent dressed in legislative clothing.

But there is a risk in this reasoning that must be named directly: the risk that the crossable threshold becomes the final destination. That the NSB, once enacted in its minimal form, is presented — by its supporters as much as its critics — as the actualization of the Capitalism of Meaning. That a transfer of €300 per month to a restricted pool of elderly, NEET youth, and long-term unemployed is absorbed into the existing grammar of Italian social policy, stripped of its

theoretical genealogy, and institutionalized as a modest improvement rather than a first structural recomposition.

This would be a defeat more serious than non-enactment. A paradigm institutionalized in its weakest form loses the critical capacity that was its only real power.

III. What Comes After: The Architecture of Phase Two

The paradigm requires a second legislative phase, and that phase has a specific shape that this afterword can begin to articulate — not as a vague programmatic aspiration, but as a set of institutional problems already partially solved in the theoretical architecture of this book.

The first problem is source. The Systemic Social Dividend, as this book conceives it, is grounded in the principle that value generated through common conditions carries common claims. This principle has a direct legislative consequence: the financing of the Dividend's expanded phases must be traceable to those common conditions. The most intellectually

coherent source — and the most politically difficult — is a form of digital commons rent: a levy structured not as a corporate income tax (which raises different issues of economic incidence and capital mobility) but as a percentage of the value extracted from common informational, infrastructural, and behavioral conditions within a defined jurisdiction.

This is not a new idea. It is related to proposals for data dividends, digital public funds, and platform contribution mechanisms that have circulated in academic and policy literature for nearly a decade. What is new in this book's contribution is the philosophical grounding: the argument that such a levy is not a penalty on innovation but a recognition of co-production. Google's advertising revenue does not exist without the publicly educated population that uses its services, the legally guaranteed infrastructure on which it operates, the research ecosystems its engineers emerged from, and the civic trust that makes its data collection socially tolerable. The rent is real. The claim is legitimate. The instrument remains to be designed.

The second problem is scale. A digital commons rent levied unilaterally by Italy would be economically distortive, legally fragile, and strategically counterproductive. The companies capable of paying it are globally mobile; the jurisdiction capable of containing them is not the nation-state. This is not an argument against the principle. It is an argument for the European level as the necessary institutional home of Phase Two.

The European Union already possesses, in embryonic form, several of the instruments required: the Digital Markets Act, the Digital Services Act, the AI Act, the data governance frameworks currently under construction, and the precedent of the global minimum corporate tax agreement. What it lacks is a fiscal architecture that connects these regulatory instruments to a visible social return — a European Systemic Social Fund that captures a portion of the rents generated by digital dominance within the single market and redistributes them to member states for territorial reinvestment and individual social dividends.

This is not utopia. It is the logical extension of what the Union has already begun. The political obstacle is real but not insurmountable: it requires a coalition of member states willing to name the problem in terms the Commission cannot easily absorb into procedural neutrality. Italy, France, and the Southern European states most exposed to platform concentration and industrial displacement are the natural core of that coalition. The argument of this book is designed, in part, to provide the theoretical vocabulary for that coalition.

The third problem is community. Territorial return cannot be achieved through individual transfers alone, however generous. The communities most damaged by systemic disruption — deindustrialized regions, logistics corridors, areas exposed to ecological transition, labor markets hollowed out by automation — require place-based institutional reinvestment that is structurally connected to the gains of transformation, not episodically delivered as emergency relief after political pressure has become intolerable.

The architecture this book proposes is a standing Territorial Transition Fund, capitalized from the same common-conditioned sources as the individual dividend, governed by transparent allocation criteria tied to measurable exposure to systemic disruption, and administered through a combination of national and regional bodies with genuine deliberative capacity. The fund would not replace existing cohesion instruments; it would supplement them with a logic of standing entitlement rather than competitive allocation. Communities would not apply for funds as supplicants. They would receive return as co-producers of the systemic value being extracted from their territories, their labor pools, their data ecologies, and their civic resilience.

IV. The Deeper Obligation: Protecting the Paradigm from Its Own Success

There is a final point that this afterword must make, and it is perhaps the most uncomfortable one.

The greatest threat to the Capitalism of Meaning as a political project is not its critics. It is its premature institutionalization. Every serious paradigm that enters the terrain of policy faces the same structural risk: it is adopted in its most diluted form, stripped of its most demanding implications, and then invoked as evidence that the transformation has been accomplished. The history of social democracy is in part a history of this process — of radical demands absorbed into administrative grammar, their critical edge blunted by the very success of their partial enactment.

The NSB can follow this path if it is not accompanied, from the outset, by a clear articulation of what it is not. It is not a universal basic income designed to compensate for the superfluousness of citizens in an automated economy. It is not a humanitarian response to poverty, however effective it may also be in reducing poverty. It is not a modest improvement to the Italian welfare state, however it may also function as such.

It is the first institutional acknowledgment that value in advanced capitalism is systemically conditioned — that the most consequential firms in the world extract extraordinary returns from common infrastructures that the political community has never adequately claimed. That acknowledgment, once made in legislative form, creates an obligation. The obligation to follow through. To name the sources more directly in Phase Two. To build the European architecture that makes direct taxation of platform rents politically viable. To create the territorial funds that translate systemic gains into place-based return. To legislate, in time, the right to life as a right of citizenship — ensuring that access to longevity-enhancing medicine does not become the ultimate positional good of a biologically stratified society.

None of this is accomplished by the NSB as drafted. All of it is made possible — and, in a meaningful sense, made necessary — by its enactment.

V. A Final Word on Courage

You began by telling me this proposal is not courageous enough. You are right. It is not yet courageous enough, and this afterword has tried to say so honestly, and to explain why.

But I want to resist one version of that critique: the version that treats political courage as synonymous with political purity — that equates seriousness with the refusal to enter the terrain of the possible. The most consequential reforms in the history of democratic capitalism were not achieved by proposals that said everything at once. They were achieved by proposals that established a principle clearly enough that the principle could not be contained by its first institutional form.

The principle this book advances is this: where value is systemic, return must be systemic. Where transformation is common, its gains cannot be entirely private. Where the digital commons generates extraordinary rents, the community that constitutes those commons has a legitimate claim on their distribution. Where longevity becomes technically governable, its

governance cannot be left to purchasing power alone.

These principles are in the book. They are in the proposal, imperfectly and partially. They will need to be in the law that follows, more directly and more completely.

That is what the next phase is for. And this afterword exists to ensure that no one — including those who will legislate this proposal into existence — mistakes the threshold for the destination.

The city of meaning is not yet built. The foundation has been laid. The obligation now is to continue.

G.B., March 2026

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Giammario Battaglia is an Italian jurist, author, and independent researcher whose work focuses on social sustainability as a structural condition of trust, cohesion, legitimacy, and systemic resilience. Over the years, he has developed an original line of inquiry aimed at repositioning the social dimension not as a compensatory outcome to be measured after the fact, but as an ex ante variable of decision-making, capable of shaping the quality, responsibility, and long-term sustainability of collective choices.

His research stands at the intersection of law, governance, public ethics, and institutional design. Through essays, public interventions, strategic documents, and broader theoretical

work, Battaglia has contributed to the development of a framework in which social sustainability is understood as an immaterial infrastructure of democratic stability and national security, rather than as a mere narrative or reputational add-on. Within this perspective, he has advanced concepts such as pre-decisional responsibility, social risk, governance prevention, and the need for new reflective safeguards capable of restoring human meaning within complex decision-making systems. He is the founder of the Human Economic Forum, an intellectual and institutional platform devoted to the relationship between economy, human dignity, and social cohesion. In this context, he has promoted a vision of public and cultural debate grounded in the conviction that economic systems can no longer be judged solely by efficiency or growth, but must also be assessed according to their capacity to generate trust, fairness, and shared belonging. Battaglia is also the creator of the conceptual figure of the Architect of Meaning, a professional and civic function designed to preserve the human, ethical, and

relational significance of decisions before they are formally taken. This work has evolved into a broader reflection on preventive governance, the crisis of technocratic rationality, and the need to reconstruct spaces in which responsibility may once again become visible, thinkable, and assumable. His writing combines legal rigor, philosophical depth, and institutional imagination. Across his work, one persistent conviction remains clear: that no economic or political order can endure if it loses contact with the human foundations that make collective life possible.