



A Leading Causes of Life Initiative (LCLI) Statement

The Leading Causes of Life: What & Why?

We pay a great deal of attention to “death”—that which harms, damages, or kills us. We do this a lot in our daily lives, but also in what we prioritize in our social institutions. “Death” is also central in the thinking of formal disciplines such as public health (with its language of “mortality,” “morbidity,” “burden of disease,” and the “leading causes of death”) as well as in much in the social sciences, philosophy, and even religious teachings and theologies (a focus on “guilt,” “shame,” “sin,” “The Fall,” to name just some framing perspectives).

What if we were to turn the spy-glass around? What if we were to focus *at least as much on life* as we do on death?

Life is the thing that works. Against the cold, solid running down that we call entropy, life is the energy that runs up, finds a way, expands into every possible crack in the predictable curtain of death, raises up a generation beyond itself. Life is the thing that goes on. And it goes on in any of your or my short, peculiar and particular span of years.

This is the focus of the “leading causes of life.” It’s a way of thinking about reality that pays attention above all to what is generative for us as human beings both personally and in relation to others and the world around us. It rests on an innovative, concretely useful set of five interlinked and interacting elements—with deep philosophical foundations. Together, they help us understand the complexity of human action and interaction.

The five leading causes are: **Agency, Coherence, Connection, Intergenerativity/blessing, and Hope.**

They are “causes” of life because they help explain real effects in our experience of the world. Most importantly, they help us grasp—and work with—the generative *human capacities that express and enhance life*. Individually and as a whole they also reflect a great deal of “found science”—knowledge gained from work done across many disciplines in both the natural and the social sciences (see boxes below for some examples).

The Five Leading Causes of Life

- Agency
- Coherence
- Connection
- Intergenerativity
- Hope



Taken together, they also represent a contribution to the science of complexity. Simple but not simplistic, comprehensive but not overwhelming, reliable and not arbitrary, they have substantial diagnostic value for describing what “gives life” to people and communities, and for seeing where and how one can act towards new possibilities.

To treat the five causes merely instrumentally—that is, as of primarily tactical, strategic or operational value—is to miss their critical philosophical underpinnings and, so, fail to grasp their full scope and real value. Why? Seen instrumentally all five causes can work negatively to serve particular, limited self-interests (personal, group or institutional, cultural, or social). As generative, however, they aim at the well-being and humanity of all. So the ends that one intends in working with the five causes, which cannot be presumed and must intentionally be sought, thus matter a great deal.

Finally, meant to be useful and not meant as dogma, the “leading causes of life” is a strongly grounded but open-ended framework for further thought and innovation.

We invite you to engage with this in working with the “leading causes of life,” in effect, to join us in this “journey of life”!

(Below is a full account of this framework and its philosophical underpinnings as well as a summary of the five causes).

The Five Leading Causes of Life

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Leading Causes of Life

The five “leading causes of life”—**agency, coherence, connection, intergenerativity/blessing**, and **hope**—offer a potent lens on why and how people and communities thrive (or don’t).

We know that working with the “five causes” can be highly productive. They can, however, be turned just as easily to negative as positive ends. So it is crucial in adopting or working with them to ask first, and always: “*towards what ends?*”

It is hard to sort out all the myriad answers that can be given to the question of which ends matter. Each of us may come up with a different answer depending upon our culture, our upbringing, what we were taught, what religion or ideology we believe in—even what phase of life we are in. A critical shift in the way we think about this is vital.

The critical shift is to ask something else: What makes it possible for us *even to think about ends in the first place*? We wouldn’t begin to do so at all unless there is something about us as human beings that allows us to imagine we can act in the world with some intentionality towards some particular ends, with some expectation of meeting them. In short, we must possess certain *capacities* even to be able to ask the question of the ends of our action. This is the key shift.

To ask about these capacities begins to throw light on the question of ends—actually, on the generative causes of life, too. Why? Because these capacities have nothing to do with any skills or capabilities that we may acquire during our life (which will differ for each person, from culture to culture, from place to place, and through time), but everything to do with what it means to be human no matter who we are otherwise.

Agency

This brings us to the first “cause” of life. Central to who we are as human beings is that we possess a *capacity for creative freedom* that, in degree, no other creature we know of has. It allows us, by using symbols systems (e.g., language, mathematics), to act in relation to nature (and to ourselves) in ways that nature itself cannot. It allows us to transcend “what is” (the actual) and to bring into being what does not otherwise exist but which “can or ought to be” (new possibilities). This is a causal capacity: it has real effects in the world.

Our *creative freedom* is our **agency** in the world. It is an *extraordinary* capacity, evident everywhere: from “simple” inventions like a plough or writing, to complex ones like a machine that flies or a symphony orchestra. Two other important points about our agency follow.

To what ends?

A dictatorship, for example, drawing on nationalist, isolationist or other self-interested ends, can leverage the five “causes” by supporting certain kinds of **agency** (and outlawing others), creating its own **coherent** view of the world against others (now the “enemy”), promoting certain **connections** to solidify support (but cutting those of anyone who resists), championing a **selective history and set of heroes** (while denigrating others), and offering a **vision** in which it and its supporters triumph (while others are vanquished).

Freedom here is not “liberty” (self-determination against social institutions), nor “free will” (choice among external options). Rather, it is our ability intentionally to initiate a sequence of events to achieve what nature on its own cannot and, so, to transform and create things and (equally significant) new forms of relationship.



First, we cannot see, touch, hear, feel, or taste this creative freedom; it is not located in some particular place in us. Nonetheless, we must assume we have it because we would not otherwise be able to explain our impact in the world. It is a *non-material* capacity that we cannot prove (or disprove). We can also say, then, that it is a *spiritual* capacity, one that is just as real as the physiological, chemical or neural material of which we consist. At the same time, there is no dualism here: we would not experience this capacity without our physical or material being.

Second, we are aware that we possess this creative freedom, that with it we have intentionally causal effects on the world. So we are able to decide how and towards what ends we intend to use it. This doesn't mean that *only* human beings have some kind of intelligence or capacity to act intentionally in the world (other creatures can, too). It's about the *degree* of freedom. No other creature is able to change either themselves or the world to anywhere near the extent which we are. This in fact even makes it possible for us to destroy the world should we so choose (or by default, by not choosing).

In short, we are willy-nilly morally responsible for what we do and why. Whether or not we choose to accept that responsibility is another matter. Nothing forces us to choose towards which ends we will exercise our agency. If it did, we would be determined, not free, and then no one could then hold us responsible for our acts. Yet we do hold ourselves (mostly) and each other (more often) responsible for what we do with our agency, and we do so in a way that we do not expect of any other creature (e.g., we do not set up a court to try a dog that has bit someone; nor do other creatures create constitutions, contracts, moral credos, and so on).

The link between our agency as creative freedom and our moral responsibility for our actions in the world is thus intrinsic. Because we are free to decide on our intentions, we can choose to act towards good or evil ends. We are moral beings, then, not because we *must* be moral but because *we can be*. This places before us the challenge of living up to the highest of which we are capable. This is the core of human spirit.

In sum: Though spirit is not reducible *merely* to agency as creative freedom, agency is a core, spiritual capacity *without which we could not even speak of what it means to be(come) human*. Agency as creative freedom and the power it gives us is thus a core "cause" of life. It includes taking moral responsibility for our presence in and impact on the world itself and, for this reason, is crucial in allowing others to flourish even as we do.

Spirit, then, is not simply a "part" of what it means to be human; it is *how* we are human. It is decisive both for our life together with others and for the world, along with its other creatures, and it presents a direct challenge to the many materially reductionist or determinist views of the human being that are so prominent in our time.



Agency

The capacity to act intentionally in the world — our ‘creative freedom’ — and our moral awareness of our responsibility for what we do and why, marks our human spirit and is a central cause of life. Inalienable and universal — the possession of each and every human being — it is the “worth” of our dignity that “has no price.”

- Agency as a non-material manifestation of human spirit is just as real as any part of our physical body or the natural world.
- To recognize and support this inherent capacity (shared by all human beings no matter what else distinguishes us) is vital to the development of human capabilities and central to any educational process, informal and formal, from birth (maybe even before) until death.
- The play of children, in this view, is not merely about the acquisition of skills but an exploration of possibilities: confronting the actual (“what is”), seeing some new possibility in it (“what could be”), and testing that possibility in action. It is a way of “working at the world,” of learning to engage with it, and, in the process, of learning to live in it alongside and with others.
- Human agency is also the key presupposition for the ten human capabilities that Martha Nussbaum (2000) regards as fundamental to full human functioning, including ‘bodily integrity,’ ‘sense, imagination and thought,’ ‘practical reason,’ ‘affiliation,’ ‘play,’ and ‘control over one’s environment.’
- It also lies behind Albert Bandura’s (1982) notion in psychology of ‘self-efficacy’ in our ability to cope with what life presents to us.
- One can see it, too, in the context of what David Korten (1990) calls ‘fourth generation’ or ‘people-centred’ development, where local agency is regarded as a sine qua non of any sustainable development, a great example being asset based community development (John Kretzmann & John McKnight, 1993).
- Zygmunt Baumann’s (1998, 2000) sociological analyses show how in “fluid modernity” (our era) agency expresses itself, sometimes against heavy constraints, through the importance of mobility in the global economy and polity.
- Agency matters for the field of occupational health at least as expressed in the American Occupational Therapy Association’s motto ‘living life to the fullest,’ and its view of OT as ‘helping people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities.’

Coherence

A second key “cause of life” is coherence. As conscious agents of our creative freedom we cannot *not* act in the world; but we also cannot act *intentionally or with any sense of how and why* unless we also possess the capacity to order our experience of ourselves and of the world.

Coherence reflects our *capacity to add to any and all experiences we have of the world* something that enables us to comprehend and order what, otherwise, are the myriad, capricious phenomena or appearances we encounter in nature and in our relationships with each other. What we add to the phenomena we experience, and what makes it possible for us to discern coherence, are non-material symbolic systems (concepts, mathematics, aesthetic images, languages, and so on) that are not immediately given

Coherence



within the phenomena themselves. In this way we understand both nature and our own place in the world.

When our experience or understanding is marked by arbitrariness and chaos (either physical or moral)—that is, when we lose a sense of coherence—we lose something crucial in our capacity to act. As is dramatically evident to anyone who watches the healthy development of a human child, coherence is at the core of human creativity and as necessary to life as is agency. So, for example, people who experience anomie (“no order”) face despair and paralysis in the face of the incoherent. Their search for a “sense of coherence” can then become desperate and the loss of it frightening if not severely debilitating.

In sum: We possess a capacity to identify coherence in both the natural order of the physical world and the moral order of our personal and social world, and we do so with a sense of respect for both orders that allows us to “find our place in the world” and to act accordingly. When a sense of order or of the unity of everything fails us, we flail, things appear chaotic and arbitrary, and, taken far enough, we suffer pathologically.

Coherence is thus a second core cause of life. Like agency, it is an imperceptible part of who we are, an expression of our profoundly dynamic human spirit.

Were we not to assume that the physical world conforms to a system of laws or statistical order that govern nature and make up a coherent totality, we would be unable to engage with it in any consistent and reliable way—everything would be completely arbitrary. But we know this is not how we experience the world. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the laws or statistics are not “lying there somewhere” in nature. *We add them* to what we experience. What’s more, when they are not adequate to our experience, we freely change them, but always in the conviction of an order that we must assume (yet cannot prove, or disprove).

Similarly, we must assume that the moral responsibility we carry for what we intend with our capacity of creative freedom has an order of its own that, should we ignore it, would come back to haunt or damage us. This sense of order *we must also add* to our experience of ourselves and of others—and it is one built on a profound respect for ourselves and our dignity and, for the same reason, of respect for all others. We give ourselves this moral law; it is not imposed upon us precisely because we are free to decide whether we will act merely for our own survival or self-interest or for the interest of all. That we are capable of doing so is manifest, though, again, we can neither prove nor disprove it.

Coherence

Coherence is how we make sense of life, how we order an otherwise overwhelming confusion of experience of nature and of ourselves in seeing our life journey as intelligible and neither wholly random nor simply victim to inexplicable forces.

- Aaron Antonovsky’s (1979, 1987) well known theory of ‘salutogenesis,’ developed because he wanted to know why some in a group of women Holocaust survivors thrived when most did not, emphasized what he called a ‘Sense of Coherence,’ for him the primary variable enabling one to predict how well someone copes with significant stressors. It depends upon: a) life appearing structured, predictable and explicable; b) resources being available to give one confidence in this; c) a conviction that it is worth investing and engaging in action to meet the challenges.
- Whether a stress factor is pathogenic, neutral or salutogenic depends upon what Antonovsky called ‘generalized resistance resources’ (GRRs), e.g., material resources, intrapersonal strength, and social resources. [The ‘leading causes of life’ offer one productive way of understanding intrapersonal and social resources.]



(Coherence, continued)

- Also relevant is the widely used notion of ‘resilience,’ meaning positive adaptation or the ability to maintain or regain mental health in spite of adversity (Wald, Taylor, Asmundson, Jang, & Stapleton, 2006). Two conditions are required to infer resilience: (1) the presence of significant adversity or a threat to adaptation or development, and (2) either adequate adaptation or recovery to adequate functioning (Riley & Masten, 2005). Resilience per se is not really a ‘cause’ of life but, rather, an outcome of other causes, encompassing more than a sense of coherence.
- Similarly, positive psychology (e.g. Seligman, 2011; Keyes, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) focuses on what is generative rather than pathological. Keyes, for example, speaks of a ‘death’ versus ‘abundant thriving’ continuum and suggests that the latter rests primarily on prevention, resilience, and coping.
- The First International Conference on Health Promotion in Ottawa in 1986 also recommended a shift towards a salutogenic approach though without any sustaining, integrating theory (see Eriksson and Lindstrom, 2008).

Connection

“Connection” as a leading cause of life concerns our experience of different kinds and levels of ties or bonds between and among human beings. Connection is crucial to us as an otherwise very vulnerable species for three reasons:

- 1) For meeting our basic needs and appetites (our “animality”);
- 2) In our need for recognition, status and prestige in the eyes of others (our “humanness” or *Menschlichkeit*); and
- 3) In encouraging us in our capacity of creative freedom to strive, beyond our self-interested animal or human needs and desires, for the highest of which we are capable as a species (which we can call “personality”).

Each level is equally vital for us. 1) We cannot eliminate our natural or “animal” needs without dying as individuals and ceasing to exist as a species. 2) Because we are inseparable from others and need them for our creative freedom to flourish, status and prestige (or recognition and affirmation) in the eyes of others is equally necessary—though this is ambiguous: seeking status and prestige can as easily encourage extraordinary achievements as it can lead to horrendous atrocities. 3) “Personality,” however, expresses the highest of which we are capable in our capacity to transcend (or choose to go beyond) our needs or self-interest for the sake of others and for the sake of the whole—to be sure, we often fail at this point but we also know that we are capable of it, and we are often inspired by those who, however conflicted, nonetheless live it out.

All of this requires us to be in connection with others. Without connection there is no community, and without community there is no life. The power of community is that it *can* make it possible, like a forest that grows

Connection



towards the light, to bend straight the crooked wood that we might otherwise be. At the same time, a community itself may be compromised or driven largely by self-interest, so it also requires self-critique on the part of the individual and an exercise of her/his agency to discern the difference.

The importance of connection can also be seen negatively:

- 1) an absence of connection can be a cause of severe pathologies, both personal and social, and
- 2) when our connections are restricted to serving self-interest (including our material needs and desire for social status, prestige, or recognition) then connection can also powerfully serve destructive ends.

Here we see why “personality” is so important in expressing the power of Spirit as creative freedom and the moral imperative that accompanies it.

Connection

Connection

As human beings we find life through complex social relationships and connections to one another, building communities of various kinds that enable us to adapt to changing threats and opportunities.

- The idea of ‘social capital,’ a commonly invoked in terms of connection, has been widely applied in many disciplines (see Bourdieu, 1990; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). Generally, scholars distinguish between bridging, bonding, and linking social capital, but in every case, the notion of ‘ties’ between people is central.
- Connectedness has also been described as the state ‘when a person is actively involved with another person, object, group, or environment, and that involvement promotes a sense of comfort, wellbeing, and anxiety-reduction’ (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patuskay, and Bouwsema, 1993: 293).
- Neurological studies (de Waal, 2009) have also recently emphasized the importance of connection in the complex relationships that human beings enter into, as have studies by scientists like Fricchione (2002) in investigating ‘adaptive processes’ in human development.
- Similarly, network science, applied to both natural and social scientific fields, is uncovering many new insights into how connectivity works, what works, and why it works (see, for example, Barabasi, 2003; Newman, Barabási & Watts, 2006).
- The idea of ecological health (Chesworth, 1996; in business, see Hawken, 2012), not unlike the Sesotho notion of bophelo, stresses the importance of connections across family, community, and other dimensions of human relationality.

Intergenerativity/Blessing

A special kind of relationship that is a “cause of life” is “intergenerativity” which we can also call “blessing”—meaning approval, affirmation, support. This is important in our acquiring of skills and in their transfer by us to others over time. But it is even more important in how we are encouraged, or encourage others, to live up to the highest of which we are capable.

Intergenerativity or Blessing



*Intergenerativity
or Blessing*

Its intergenerational dimensions are particularly significant. The human species is a historical species. It is consciously, not just instinctually, linked to the past and the future. Without the inherited “skills” from our ancestors, we could not survive and thrive. These “skills” include insights from theoretical reason (how to work leather, wood or iron, or how to calculate weights, measures, and currencies, to give simple examples).

Equally, and more critically, we require the kind of community that is necessary for encouraging us in the use of practical reason—our passion for, our commitment to, and our responsibility for creative freedom in the world. This includes acknowledging the freedom and dignity of others as well as taking responsibility for our acts and their effects on others (including other creatures and nature itself). It is driven by the question of what we *ought* to do in the world.

This is far from trivial. We are inescapably part of a concrete community or tradition, but that does not necessarily make us agents of life. The history of humanity’s destructiveness is crushing, not least when particular communities act against others in their self-interest.

The cultivation of the highest of which we are capable as human beings is not abstract, then. It is embodied in the lives of particular people, maybe sometimes even in a specific group or community, who encourage us when they manifestly act out of full moral responsibility for the autonomous, creative freedom they possess. They inspire us and nurture us by demonstrating not just what *they* are capable of but what *we* are capable of be(com)ing.

Intergenerativity, then, is vital not only to anchor us in the “culture of skills” but also in what we can call the “culture of rearing” by which we embrace our creative freedom or agency alongside our moral responsibility for what we do with it, for the sake of all and for the sake of the whole.

A community of spirit?
Yes. But seldom, if ever, is this a particular empirical community; rather, it remains an invisible community of people who transcend the limits of their own particular traditions, places or spaces, who in this sense transcend the self-interested aspects of our humanity and help us similarly transcend our own.

Intergenerativity/Blessing

When our lives are blessed and nurtured by those who come before and after us, we are encouraged, strengthened, enlivened, and better able to shape our own lives to make vital choices. Active blessing means bestowing upon another approval or praise — affirming their sacredness as person — wishing them well.

- In Erik Eriksson’s theory of psychosocial development, ‘generativity’ means ‘an adult’s concern for and commitment to promoting the well-being of youth and future generations through involvement in parenting, teaching, mentoring, and other creative contributions that aim to leave a positive legacy of the self for the future’ (see www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/; also McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998).
- The famous Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development longitudinal study of a cohort of about 1000 people from Dunedin, New Zealand, born in one year in the 1970s, includes an on-going Parenting Study and Next Generation Study (<http://dunedinstudy.otago.ac.nz/>).



(Intergenerativity/Blessing, continued)

- Community psychologists speak of ‘historical trauma,’ the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over generations of families or particular population groups (e.g. colonized indigenous peoples) and its positive, non-pathological counterpart (e.g. South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee).
- Epigenetics (non-genetic factors that influence gene expression across generations) in microbiology similarly suggests that there are discernible generative factors that positively influence life.
- In sociology, the idea of the ‘significant other’ (Sullivan, 1953; Mead, 1937) refers to those who directly socialize the person to whom they are significant, providing a reference point for identity, belief and behaviour.

Hope

Hope, as a “leading cause of life,” does not refer to hope for materially successful existence in the world, nor to hope in some speculative afterlife or other realm of existence outside the world in which we find life (however much we might want one or the other in the face of all that challenges or hurts us). Rather, it rests precisely on our understanding of ourselves as Spirit expressed through our spiritual capacities for agency and coherence, supported by our connections with others and to the world, including those who bless us.

Hope is what inspires an expression of the fullness of our human being by embracing our Spirit and cultivating our spiritual capacities. We don’t create our conditions of possibility as human beings; they are given to us *a priori*. Within the limits of our understanding, we cannot know whence this *a priori* comes (though we can and do speculate about it). Yet it is right to treat our extra-yet-ordinary Spirit and spiritual capacities as a “gift.” We did not create them but we find ourselves with them—and we are capable of living out of and in response to this gift to a degree we find nowhere else in nature.

Why is hope so significant as a leading cause of life? Hope consists in our trust that it is never possible for us to lose Spirit and our spiritual capacities so long as we are alive. To the extent that hope in an afterlife or anything else contributes to our trust in Spirit and the power of spiritual capacities in this life or helps us respond to the despair that otherwise inhibits us from embracing and living up to the highest of which we are capable not merely out of mere self-interest, we may see such hope as generative, too.

Hope as trust in our Spirit and spiritual capacities is grounded in the fact that possibility (what can or ought to be) is just as real as

Hope

We can even say that hope, as the gift of spirit and its capacities in us, takes us to the core of religion. It is not insignificant that as far as we know the human species is the only species that engages in anything remotely like “religion.” But we miss the significance of this if we focus primarily on the historical manifestations that we usually call religion. There we perceive (and usually emphasize) the differences among other traditions and our own. When we view things from the perspective of spirit and our and spiritual capacities as a gift, in which we may place some faith even if we cannot “know” (prove or disprove) the origin of this gift, then we can appreciate the significance of religion for life at a far more fundamental, even necessary and universal, level. Even the “atheist” empirical scientist lives out of this kind of faith in order to do her/his work at all.



actuality (what is) and that new possibilities always lie before us (even if only some can be realized), coupled with our capacities for creative freedom and for taking moral responsibility for how we ought to live. Spirit as new possibility thus also has a permanently unsettling dimension to it, a potentially disruptive power in the midst of unjust, exploitative orders.

Hope, then, is an affirmation of who and what we are. It is what the ineliminable, irreducible, and irreplaceable gift of Spirit evokes precisely because, as long as we exist, no matter how ingrained our habits and how notoriously destructive and self-serving those habits can be, Spirit and its spiritual capacities are the condition of possibility for any and all experience and regeneration of ourselves as responsible, creative agents in the world.

It is enhanced to the degree that we can hope in an invisible community committed to humanity's spiritual, supersensible capacities, as well—to imagine and know that we are not alone in seeking to express the highest of virtue and justice of which we are capable.

Hope

Hope in the deepest sense is not optimism or wishful thinking: it is about our capacity to imagine a different, healthier future and to find the energy to do something to bring it about.

- Many have probed the significance of hope for human life (noting that this is not to be confused with 'wish,' 'desire' or mere 'feelings of optimism'), including several 20th Century philosophers (e.g. Marcel, 1962; Bloch, 1986).
- The studies by Schachter et al (2007) suggest that hope as 'anticipatory consciousness' (Bloch's meaning too) can be grounded in neurobiology, located in what he calls our 'prospective brain.'
- David Harvey (2000), economic geographer, links hope to individual and collective action 'within an on-going flow of living processes' he terms 'the web of life.'
- Various studies in psychology have also attempted to assess the significance of hope for health (see, for example, Scioli et al, 1997).

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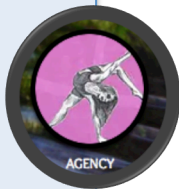


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Leading Causes of Life (Summary of the Five Causes)

Agency



The capacity to act intentionally in the world — our ‘creative freedom’ — and our moral awareness of our responsibility for what we do and why, marks our human spirit and is a central cause of life. Inalienable and universal—the possession of each and every human being — it is the “worth” of our dignity that “has no price.”

Coherence



Coherence is how we make sense of life, how we order an otherwise overwhelming confusion of experience of nature and of ourselves in seeing our life journey as intelligible and neither wholly random nor simply victim to inexplicable forces.

Connection



As human beings we find life through complex social relationships and connections to one another, building communities of various kinds that enable us to adapt to changing threats and opportunities.

Intergenerativity/Blessing



When our lives are blessed and nurtured by those who come before and after us, we are encouraged, strengthened, enlivened and better able to shape our own lives, to make vital choices. Active blessing means bestowing upon another approval or praise — affirming their sacredness as person — wishing them well.

Hope



Hope in the deepest sense is not optimism or wishful thinking: it is about our capacity to imagine a different, healthier future and to find the energy to do something to bring it about.