

THE FREEDOM TO EXIST

Volume VII

The Root of Conflict

Beliefs, Power, Resources and Human Responsibility

Juan Segurola

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Contents

Preface	3
1. How Conflict Begins	3
2. Beliefs, Identity and Belonging	4
3. Interests, Resources and Inequality	6
4. Power, Obedience and Legitimacy	7
5. Violence and Its Justifications	8
6. Understanding and Responsibility	10
7. Cooperation Without Submission	11
8. Conditions for Just Coexistence	12
References (Vancouver)	14

Preface

This book argues that conflict has plural, interacting roots: incompatible interpretations, social identities, unequal resources, and contested authority. No one of these explains every case. The following chapters examine how each becomes consequential and what institutions can do without promising the disappearance of disagreement.

The previous volumes examine freedom, understanding, simplicity, the experience of being alive, solitude, and purposeful action. This volume addresses the tensions that arise when free people share a world. Its purpose is not to offer a doctrine or portray every conflict as equivalent, but to distinguish disagreement, inequality, coercion, and responsibility. Claims about particular authors are cited; the normative synthesis belongs to the author. The chapters invite scrutiny rather than allegiance.

1. How Conflict Begins

A conflict need not begin with aggression. It may arise when two people attach incompatible meanings to a decision, when a need is neglected, or when a rule distributes benefits and burdens unequally. Disagreement belongs to human plurality; hostility is only one possible development. Not every difference requires immediate settlement, and not every agreement is fair. Our first task is to identify what is actually disputed and who bears the consequences.

At least three dimensions interact: verifiable events, interpretations of those events, and material conditions that constrain available choices. One person may read a delay as disrespect while another sees an unavoidable obligation.

Checking the event may not resolve a need for recognition. Conversely, a respectful conversation does not create affordable housing, available time, or sufficient resources. Treating these dimensions as interchangeable leads to shallow remedies.

Research on conflict has examined the different directions encouraged by cooperative and competitive relationships. Deutsch investigated conditions under which conflict becomes constructive or destructive [1]. His approach does not allow us to predict an individual's behavior from one variable: trust, prior experience, and unequal power matter. Conflict is a process that can escalate or change, not an immutable property of people.

A useful first inquiry produces two accounts. One sets out what happened without moral adjectives; the other states what each participant believes those events mean. If someone says, "I was excluded," we can ask which decision created that experience, how it was reached, and whether participation was possible. This distinction does not dismiss distress. It makes it possible to investigate whether an unfair procedure, a misunderstanding, or both were involved.

Responsibility for initiating an action must also be distinguished from responsibility for escalating a dispute. A disproportionate reaction is not justified merely by an earlier grievance. Yet generic calls for dialogue can be inappropriate when a participant is experiencing intimidation or harm. Safety, boundaries, and protection must then precede any meeting between the parties.

No single cause explains all conflicts. Scarcity may intensify competition, yet wealthy institutions also quarrel over status, jurisdiction, and recognition. Identity can transform a small dispute into a symbolic threat, but groups with opposed identities may cooperate when their material arrangements are fair. The plural account is not an evasion: it requires asking which mechanism is active, at what scale, and through which feedback loops. An economic explanation can illuminate distribution without exhausting the meaning of humiliation; a psychological explanation can illuminate hostility without explaining who controls the rules.

An objection is that an account with several roots explains everything and therefore predicts nothing. That objection is justified if causes are merely accumulated. A useful plural account makes discriminating claims: where resource allocation is decisive, changing allocation should reduce the dispute; where a credible procedure is missing, resources alone may not restore trust; where sanctions punish dissent, private dialogue may conceal rather than settle the conflict. The task is to test such differences against evidence and to remain willing to revise the diagnosis.

A disagreement becomes a conflict when a preference is translated into a claim that others must acknowledge, resist or accommodate. This distinction matters because not every difference requires a negotiated agreement. Two people may disagree over meaning while leaving one another's choices untouched; a dispute over access to a shared resource necessarily changes what each can do. A useful analysis therefore identifies the object of contention, the parties capable of acting, the practical stakes and the institutions that distribute costs. It asks who may exit the relationship, who must remain, and whether remaining silent is genuinely voluntary. These questions help distinguish friction inherent in plural life from avoidable injury. They also guard against describing every disagreement as a failure of communication: some parties understand their interests perfectly and still pursue incompatible outcomes.

Understanding the origins of conflict does not require imagining a world without differences. The central task is to develop procedures that recognize disagreement before it turns into a struggle to deny the other's legitimacy. Explaining a mechanism is an exercise in responsibility, not an excuse for its outcomes.

2. Beliefs, Identity and Belonging

Beliefs help us navigate the world, but they can also become signs of membership. When an opinion ceases to be a revisable claim and becomes part of who we are, correcting it can feel like losing an identity. Disagreement is then experienced not simply as a challenge to a proposition but as a rejection of a group. This transition helps explain why apparently minor disputes can provoke unusually intense reactions.

Tajfel and Turner developed an influential approach to social categorization, group identification, and intergroup conflict [2]. Recognizing an in-group and an out-group does not necessarily generate hostility, but it may encourage comparisons that alter our evaluation of similar actions depending on who

performed them. This is not a claim that everyone in a community is prejudiced; it is a caution about unexamined evaluations.

Belonging also offers protection. Families, associations, and traditions provide language, solidarity, and continuity. A philosophy of autonomy that demanded abandoning every bond would confuse freedom with isolation. The problem emerges when membership requires surrendering critical judgment, remaining silent about abuse, or denying equivalent rights to outsiders. A mature community tolerates disagreement without automatically treating it as betrayal.

Three questions can help: “What do I believe?”, “Why do I think it is true?”, and “What do I fear losing if it changes?” The third does not disprove the belief, but may reveal emotional stakes that make revision difficult. Religious, political, and cultural disagreements deserve careful consideration on their merits; it would be unfair to reduce every serious conviction to a psychological mechanism.

Understanding motives complements, rather than replaces, evaluating reasons.

Language frequently intensifies antagonism. Phrases such as “they always” or “we never” turn contingent actions into essential properties of entire populations. A better approach identifies decisions, decision-makers, dates, and effects. Precision allows legitimate criticism of an institution without indiscriminate hostility toward everyone sharing an identity with its leaders.

An identity is not inherently an instrument of exclusion. Shared memories can sustain care and collective agency; the danger arises when loyalty is treated as an exemption from scrutiny. The analysis of solitude and belonging in Volume V concerned the individual's ability to differ from a group. Here the question shifts to institutions: can members challenge leaders, contest classifications, and leave an association without losing access to essential rights? A disagreement within a group tests not only personal independence but the rules through which membership is governed.

One might object that common identity is impossible if every commitment remains revisable. Yet disagreement need not dissolve a community; it can expose which obligations are shared and which are imposed. The requirement is not permanent skepticism about every custom, but a difference between mutual commitment and coerced unanimity. Communities need procedures for dissent, including reasons given in public and protection of persons who are treated as outsiders. Those procedures can strengthen belonging by making it less dependent on silence.

Collective identification can supply solidarity to those whose individual voices have been ignored. For that reason, it would be mistaken to regard belonging itself as a dangerous illusion. The critical threshold appears when a shared identity is treated as proof of an individual's intentions, when dissenters are described as traitors, or when membership is made conditional on repeating unexamined beliefs. A community can protect an inherited practice without requiring its members to endorse every explanation offered on its behalf. The practical test is whether participants can revise their beliefs, criticize their leaders and maintain relationships across internal disagreement without losing basic standing.

Freedom of conscience is tested when we defend another person's right to hold an idea we consider mistaken, provided their actions respect the rights of others. This does not require indifference to harm. It means separating a person's dignity from the quality of their arguments and creating conditions in which revising a view does not entail losing every relationship.

3. Interests, Resources and Inequality

Not all conflicts begin in interpretation. Some involve materially incompatible demands on limited space, housing, care time, or environmental resources. Courtesy can improve negotiation, but it cannot manufacture adequate resources. An exclusively psychological account risks blaming disadvantaged people for conditions they did not create and cannot control.

Inequality changes the practical meaning of choice. Two individuals may formally agree to a contract, while one cannot refuse without losing income, housing, or protection. Fairness therefore requires attention to each participant's real alternatives. Sen has emphasized assessing the lives people can actually lead rather than looking solely at ideal institutional arrangements [3]. We use that perspective as a normative orientation, not as proof of a specific empirical proposition about every dispute.

Shared resources create further difficulties. Individually rational uses of land, water, or infrastructure can undermine a common resource where legitimate rules and monitoring are absent. Ostrom documented different institutional arrangements through which communities have governed common-pool resources [4]. Her work warns against both naive faith in spontaneous cooperation and the assumption that one centralized solution will suit every context.

An analysis of distribution should specify the available resource, the relevant needs, the allocation rule, and the costs borne under that rule. In an apartment building, for instance, a major repair cannot always be settled fairly by counting votes alone. Technical urgency, residents' finances, structural safety, and feasible payment arrangements may all matter. An apparently equal contribution can impose radically unequal hardship.

Two symmetrical reductions should be avoided. The first is the claim that every dispute is ultimately economic. The second is the belief that changing attitudes alone will eliminate material inequality. Ideas can organize material interests, while resources can reinforce identities. Their interaction calls for contextual investigation and reliable evidence, especially when public policy is at stake.

A distributive conflict concerns not only how much each party receives but which risks each is made to bear. A formally equal rule can be unjust when one party has the reserves to endure delay and another loses housing, health, or income while a decision is pending. Hence procedures must consider asymmetries of exposure, information and bargaining power. The relevant comparison is often not between perfect equality and unlimited freedom, but between feasible arrangements that preserve different degrees of real agency.

An objection is that emphasizing inequality makes every unsuccessful negotiation evidence of injustice. That would confuse an unfavorable outcome with an unfair

process. The distinction requires examining baseline entitlements, accessible information, opportunities to contest a decision, and the burden of remedy. Nor should a disadvantaged person be made responsible for correcting the structure that constrained their choices. The purpose of diagnosis is to identify institutions capable of bearing responsibility, not to turn vulnerability into a moral failing.

Resource conflicts often contain a temporal dimension that is absent from immediate bargaining. An arrangement may benefit present participants while transferring environmental costs, debt or exhausted infrastructure to people not represented at the table. Future generations cannot consent, and displaced populations may have no voice in the institutions that administer the resource. This does not provide a mechanical formula for allocation. It does, however, require explicit attention to who bears delayed costs, how uncertainty is distributed and whether decisions can be revised before damage becomes irreversible. The lesson of common-resource governance is not that cooperation always succeeds, but that clear rules, credible monitoring and meaningful participation can change incentives that would otherwise reward unilateral appropriation.

Responsible resolution does not promise to fulfill every desire. It makes trade-offs visible, distributes burdens by defensible criteria, and allows decisions to be challenged. A fair society cannot abolish scarcity; it can refuse to turn scarcity into a standing permission for arbitrary treatment.

4. Power, Obedience and Legitimacy

Power is not limited to issuing orders. It also includes setting agendas, deciding which problems deserve attention, controlling information, and shaping which alternatives people can imagine. Power can enable legitimate coordination, including in emergencies, but it can also conceal privilege behind claims of technical necessity. The question is not simply whether authority exists but how it is justified, constrained, and corrected.

Obedience serves everyday purposes. Traffic rules, clinical protocols, and deliberative procedures allow different lives to coexist. Yet obeying a command is not the same as establishing its moral legitimacy. Hierarchy does not dissolve personal responsibility when a decision harms others. Integrity requires attention to ends, means, and the rights that may be affected.

Arendt offered an influential conceptual distinction between power and violence, although her account has prompted different interpretations and objections [5]. The distinction helps resist the assumption that coercive force alone establishes authority. A government may suppress open disagreement without generating trust; an institution may be obeyed through fear while lacking a sufficient public justification for its actions.

Legitimacy depends on recognizable procedures: accessible rules, opportunities to respond, public reasons, and safeguards against abuse. But a formally regular decision may still violate fundamental rights. Legality is significant without being an automatic guarantee of justice. Institutions must permit review, repair, and effective constraints on their own power.

Within a workplace, technical authority deserves respect when it supplies reasons that can be checked. Expertise should not become immunity from error. An experienced person may be mistaken, and someone who notices the mistake needs a safe route to report it. Organizational trust rests on competence and on the genuine possibility of dissent without retaliation.

The power to set an agenda differs from the power to win an open vote. Bachrach and Baratz made the exclusion of issues from decisions a problem of political analysis, while Lukes examined how power can shape the very terms in which interests are understood. These are conceptual proximities, not claims that this book derives from either theory. They warn that an institution cannot demonstrate legitimacy solely by pointing to the fairness of decisions made after some questions have already been ruled inadmissible. [6, 7]

Obedience is not automatically legitimate because a command is lawful, and refusal is not automatically justified because a person sincerely disagrees. Civil disobedience may seek public correction of a serious injustice through constrained, accountable action; conscientious refusal raises a related but distinct question about complicity. The objection is that tolerated disobedience undermines every rule. The response is that a stable constitutional order needs ordinary compliance alongside lawful avenues of challenge, judicial review and, in exceptional cases, principled resistance. The burden of justification increases with the foreseeable harms of resistance and with the failure to try peaceful remedies first. See also Rawls on civil disobedience [8].

Authority and legitimacy are related but not identical. An official may possess lawful power while applying it arbitrarily; a community representative may enjoy trust without having a recognized legal mandate. Consent also needs careful interpretation. The absence of protest does not prove agreement when dissent brings loss of employment, exclusion or violence. A more demanding test asks whether decisions are publicly justified, whether affected people may contest them and whether officeholders are subject to rules they did not write solely for their own benefit. Accountability must extend beyond symbolic consultation: criticism should be capable of producing correction.

Autonomy does not require rejecting authority as such. It requires retaining moral judgment rather than delegating it without scrutiny. Responsible obedience acknowledges legitimate roles while keeping proportionality, rights, and accountability open to question. Without those conditions, apparent order may be only a silenced conflict.

5. Violence and Its Justifications

Violence represents a qualitative break: disagreement becomes imposition through harm or threatened harm. It can appear as physical assault, intimidation, coercion, and other forms of serious deprivation. The term should not be stretched so far that every discomfort counts as violence. Nor should it be narrowed to the point where systematic harms embedded in institutions become invisible.

Galtung proposed a distinction between direct and structural violence in a classic article in peace research [9]. This framework has been influential, but it cannot

replace case-specific legal or causal analysis. Its value here is conceptual: it prompts us to ask whether harmful circumstances follow from identifiable actions, persistent social conditions, or their interaction.

Justifications of violence are often framed as exceptions: an extraordinary threat, a superior purpose, or the alleged inferiority of an opponent. Not every case is morally equivalent. Protecting a person under attack is not identical to initiating an attack. Even where coercive intervention might be justified, however, necessity, proportionality, protection of third parties, and oversight remain crucial. Declared ends do not render every means acceptable.

In ordinary life, escalation may begin with the normalization of contempt. Repeatedly saying that a group deserves humiliation does not mechanically produce assault, but it may lower barriers to excusing harm. Criticism of a policy, belief, or action remains legitimate; portraying people as inherently inferior undermines the reciprocity needed for disagreement.

Responding to violence does not always mean bringing victims and perpetrators together to “understand each other.” It may instead require separation, independent support, fact-finding, immediate protection, and access to justice. Restorative approaches, where appropriate, need safeguards, voluntary participation, and accountability. They must never displace the protection of people at risk.

Self-defense and resistance to unjust rule cannot be reduced to slogans about violence being either always necessary or always forbidden. The questions include immediacy of threat, necessity, proportionality, alternatives and responsibility to people not participating in the conflict. A state's claim to the legitimate use of force is a claim requiring institutional constraint, not proof that each exercise of force is legitimate. Conversely, naming injustice does not grant an unlimited mandate to use force in its name. The state-claim terminology has an acknowledged proximity to Weber [10].

A serious objection to the language of structural violence is that it can become so broad that all preventable suffering is treated as violence, erasing crucial differences between neglect, exclusion and deliberate assault. The distinction between direct coercion and institutional patterns should therefore remain explicit; the analysis should specify an actor or process, a causal mechanism and a possible remedy. Yet insisting on conceptual precision does not require ignoring predictable harms produced without a single identifiable aggressor. It requires describing them accurately.

Public arguments about force frequently collapse several distinctions. Self-defense is different from punishment; immediate protection differs from retaliation; restraint differs from the desire to humiliate an adversary. The moral vocabulary of necessity, proportionality, discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate targets and accountability is useful precisely because intentions described as protective can coexist with disproportionate means. These criteria do not settle every emergency, and people facing real danger may have limited information. Nevertheless, uncertainty strengthens the duty to avoid simplistic declarations that every use of force either proves courage or constitutes moral failure.

A culture of peace cannot promise a total absence of conflict. Its goal is to prevent force from being treated as the final argument and humiliation from being mistaken for virtue. The ethics of a cause are revealed especially clearly in how it treats those who oppose it.

6. Understanding and Responsibility

Understanding does not mean absolving. We can explain the experiences, fears, and incentives surrounding an action while recognizing the harm it caused. Confusing explanation with justification weakens judgment: if every cause excused a deed, responsibility would disappear; if understanding were forbidden, opportunities to prevent repetition would be lost. Responsibility requires both a careful description and a normative standard.

Intention, conduct, consequence, and repair should be distinguished. Good intentions can produce harm; severe harm does not by itself prove malicious intent. These distinctions do not automatically settle legal duties, but they guard against impulsive judgments. Asking what was known, what could reasonably have been foreseen, and which alternatives were available helps identify relevant responsibilities.

Listening sometimes means presenting the strongest fair version of another person's position without inventing arguments they have not made. We may recognize a legitimate need behind an unreasonable demand, or a real fear behind a mistaken conclusion. Recognition does not compel agreement. We can say, "I understand what you need and why this decision worries you; I do not accept your proposed solution."

Where power is unequal, requiring identical composure from all sides may conceal different obligations. Those controlling resources, decisions, or protective institutions have additional responsibilities. Impartiality is not the automatic division of blame into equal shares; it is the consistent application of reasons to evidence, including the perspectives of people excluded from ordinary decision-making.

Repair involves more than an apology. Depending on the circumstances, it may require restitution, revised rules, public acknowledgment, or safeguards against further violations. Sometimes it means recognizing that trust will not immediately return. A harmed person retains the right to distance and protection; reconciliation cannot be demanded as a debt.

Explanation and excuse answer different questions. To explain an act is to investigate how it became possible; to excuse it is to judge whether responsibility should be reduced. This distinction matters especially when institutions investigate misconduct: an inquiry that refuses to understand incentives will repeat preventable failures, while one that treats context as complete absolution will deny agency and injury. The decision must be reasoned with regard to coercion, knowledge, alternatives and consequences.

A familiar objection is that listening to all sides grants equal standing to a threat and to the person threatened. It need not. Listening is an epistemic practice, not an allocation of moral equivalence. Where there is a credible danger of retaliation, protection and independent investigation can precede direct

encounter. Responsibility can then be assigned without requiring a harmed person to participate in reconciliation. A process oriented to truth is not automatically a process oriented to forgiveness.

Understanding another person's motives can improve prediction and reduce needless escalation. It can also become a burden unfairly placed on people already injured. A victim need not interpret an aggressor charitably before asking for protection or restitution. Explanatory understanding is different from excuse: learning how fear, ideology or incentives shaped a decision does not erase the agent's obligations. At the same time, responsibility does not require imagining that people acted under perfectly equal conditions. The relevant inquiry connects capacity, foreseeable consequences, coercion, available alternatives and duties owed to others, rather than choosing between total blame and total exoneration.

Understanding conflict expands the tools of judgment. It does not oblige us to abandon convictions, but it does require distinguishing what we know from what we suppose, and the motives we attribute from the effects we can examine. This discipline allows firmness without treating hostility as a virtue.

7. Cooperation Without Submission

Cooperation is often presented as an unconditional good. Yet calls to cooperate can also demand conformity or transfer burdens to people with little room to refuse. A genuinely cooperative arrangement preserves participants' voices, boundaries, and ability to revisit the agreement. Collaboration is neither unconditional obedience nor abandonment of legitimate interests.

Fisher, Ury, and Patton popularized negotiation methods that separate people from problems, explore interests, and favor objective criteria [11]. Their approach offers a practical repertoire, not a guarantee of equitable agreement in every context. Threats, manipulated information, or extreme dependence may require external safeguards before negotiation can be meaningful rather than a ratification of pre-existing inequality.

Any proposal can be evaluated by asking which needs it meets, which obligations it creates, how future disagreements will be addressed, and what happens if someone wants to leave. Clear recognition of disagreement is safer than vague celebrations of harmony. Ambiguous commitments can look cordial today and produce resentment tomorrow because participants believed they agreed to different things.

Cooperation calls for reciprocity, not identical contributions in every moment. Within families, capacities and needs change with age, illness, or employment conditions. Justice does not require everyone to perform exactly the same tasks. It requires recognizing effort, distributing responsibilities reasonably, and keeping arrangements open to revision.

Conflict may correct failures within cooperative relationships. A member who challenges an inefficient or discriminatory rule does not necessarily damage the common project; their objection may prevent apparent obedience from hiding deterioration. For this reason, processes for raising objections, recording dissent, and revising decisions without retaliation are essential.

Hirschman's distinction between exit and voice is a useful proximity for thinking about participation: people may leave an organization, or try to change it from within. Here the institutional question extends the personal freedom developed in Volume V. Exit is not a meaningful safeguard if departure means losing indispensable services; voice is not effective if complaints are recorded but cannot affect decisions. Volume VI discussed recording unresolved objections in collaborative work. In public institutions, such a record also needs a rule specifying who must respond, how, and with what prospect of remedy. [12]

One might object that demanding these safeguards makes cooperation slow or paralyzes leadership. Yet the absence of challenge may only shift costs onto those least able to object. A workable design can distinguish decisions requiring urgent action from those allowing consultation, preserve an appeal route, and make the reasons for exceptions reviewable. Cooperation without submission is not consensus at every moment; it is a distribution of authority that remains contestable after a decision.

There are also occasions when compromise is ethically insufficient. Dividing a disputed good may be reasonable; splitting the difference between equal protection and systematic discrimination is not an acceptable middle ground. Non-submissive cooperation can include organized dissent, strikes, litigation or refusal to participate in an exploitative arrangement. These actions need assessment of their consequences and proportionality, but they should not automatically be treated as breakdowns of dialogue. Cooperation and resistance are sometimes complementary: a fairer institutional settlement may emerge precisely because those excluded from previous agreements develop collective power to demand negotiation on different terms.

Free cooperation requires an effective right to say no. Coordination may survive when that right disappears, but its moral basis is weakened. The strength of a community is not measured by the absence of visible disagreement but by how it treats those who express it.

8. Conditions for Just Coexistence

Just coexistence does not depend on everyone sharing one philosophy of life. It depends on rules that allow different people to live without subjection, resolve disagreements, and demand explanations from those exercising power. This common ground requires rights, reliable institutions, and everyday practices of respect. Inner goodwill is insufficient unless expressed through material and procedural arrangements.

Rawls developed an influential theory concerning the principles and institutions of a just society [8]. His framework does not settle every contemporary debate, but it helps explain why immediate majority satisfaction cannot be the only standard. Basic liberties, the position of disadvantaged people, and the conditions under which rules are negotiated also deserve attention.

Practicable coexistence needs understandable information, participation proportionate to the impact of decisions, and protection against retaliation. Rules lose legitimacy when applied selectively or when remedies are inaccessible.

Formal equality before the law matters, but exercising rights requires time, resources, and genuine opportunities to bring a claim.

It also requires limits on our own cause. Being convinced that we defend something valuable does not exempt us from justifying our means. Personal autonomy cannot ignore its effects on others; appeals to the common good cannot legitimately erase particular individuals. There is no universal formula that settles every case. Public, revisable reasoning must remain attentive to context.

In personal relationships, we can practice modest versions of these principles: explain decisions before imposing them, record agreements, acknowledge mistakes, and correct unfair distributions. Within organizations and societies, such habits need persistent procedures. Individual virtue does not replace suitable institutions, yet institutions cannot function without people willing to demand and respect reasons.

Reasonable pluralism, central to Rawls's later political liberalism, highlights that durable institutions cannot depend on agreement about a single comprehensive philosophy. Republican accounts of non-domination, associated with Pettit, and Margalit's concern with non-humiliation identify nearby standards for assessing the treatment of persons. These are acknowledged proximities rather than declarations of intellectual derivation. The institutional task is to secure conditions under which disagreement does not imply arbitrary dependence or degradation. [13, 14, 15]

Tolerance has limits. An actor who uses the liberty of association to intimidate others or abolish their equal standing cannot claim immunity from proportionate legal constraint in the name of pluralism. But a second objection arises: who decides where tolerance ends, if the procedures themselves are disputed? Their legitimacy must be earned through accessible reasons, independent challenge, equal standing and the possibility of amendment. No procedure eliminates conflict; a defensible procedure changes how conflict can be contested without domination. The plural-root account defended here closes with an open task: maintain institutions capable of learning which harms their own rules produce.

A just coexistence cannot be reduced to the expectation that people will be kind. It needs institutions capable of protecting rights when goodwill fails.

Independent review, transparent reasons for decisions, predictable procedures and accessible remedies are safeguards against the concentration of discretionary power. They should be judged by how they operate for those with the least influence, not solely by what their formal charters promise. Yet institutions can also become rigid. A well-designed system must therefore make its own failures visible and permit revision without demanding that every conflict threaten the entire political order.

This discussion returns to a theme of the collection: the experience of existing among others. Freedom to think, feel, and act gains depth when we recognize that other people also seek lives free from humiliation and domination. We do not have to abolish every tension to coexist. We must prevent difference from becoming permission to deny another person's dignity. Conflict has many roots; responsible action begins by refusing to make the other person voiceless.

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