

New glossary entry: health

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To link to this morning's video, I have published this new glossary entry:

Health is the capacity to heal, by which I mean the ability of a person, a community, or an ecosystem to move towards wellness. It is not a static state of perfection, nor the mere absence of disease. Health is a process; a direction of travel. It is a verb, not a noun.

First, health is dynamic. Bodies repair themselves, minds adapt, communities support recovery, and environments regenerate when conditions allow. To be healthy is to have the resilience, resources, and support to return to balance and to then flourish after things go wrong. Illness is part of life; the question is whether healing is possible.

Second, health depends on context. Nutrition, housing, income, education, clean air and water, meaningful work, and social connection all shape the ability to heal. This is why the language of "lifestyle choice" so often misses the point. Health is a social condition as much as a biological one. Social security, strong public services, and decent living standards are therefore key to health policy.

Third, health is collective. One person's well-being depends on others, whether they be carers, clinicians, families, neighbours, or public institutions. A health system focused only on managing disease without addressing poverty, inequality, or environmental damage treats symptoms but neglects causes. Care, prevention, and community resilience are essential.

Fourth, health has an economic dimension. An economy organised around insecurity, pollution, and stress weakens people's capacity to heal. Underfunded health services, precarious work, poor housing and a lack of social security support all increase illness and reduce the likelihood of recovery. Investment in the five forms of capital - environmental, human, social, physical, and financial - is therefore investment in health.

Finally, defining health as the ability to heal changes policy. It shifts attention from treating disease alone to creating the conditions that enable recovery and flourishing. It asks whether our economy supports care, stability, and dignity, or undermines them.

Health is a movement towards well-being. It is the lived expression of a politics of care in an economy and society organised so that people and communities can heal, adapt, and thrive together.