

Before the Proposition: Dependent Origination, Contingency, and the Pre-Symbolic Genesis of Knowing

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Abstract

This paper examines the formation of knowing before it becomes stabilized as an explicit proposition, definition, or other symbolic epistemic output. Philosophical and scientific accounts of knowledge frequently privilege articulated results, while the conditions through which those results become epistemically possible receive less attention. The present inquiry focuses on the generative interval in which an encounter, discrepancy, affective disturbance, or contingent relation begins to reorganize a subject's epistemic orientation before a determinate conceptual formulation is available.

The paper develops a relational account of this process through the concepts of dependent origination, contingency, pre-articulated apprehension, and symbolic formation. Knowing is approached as an event whose emergence can depend upon historically accumulated dispositions, material and social conditions, prior symbolic organization, concrete encounters, and contingencies that cannot be reconstructed from the final proposition alone. The distinction among what is not yet symbolized, what is only partially symbolizable under existing conditions, and what may resist complete symbolic preservation is maintained throughout the analysis. Symbolization is consequently treated as an epistemically productive transformation rather than as the transparent transcription of an already completed internal content.

A Generative Relational perspective is used to examine the trajectory from latent epistemic organization through encounter and pre-articulated differentiation toward question formation and propositional expression. Comparative resources from Buddhist accounts of dependent origination and seed-manifestation relations, phenomenology, pragmatism, tacit knowing, and process-oriented approaches are employed without assuming doctrinal equivalence among them. The paper argues that a proposition can preserve an epistemic result while failing to preserve the trajectory through which that result became meaningful. The history of knowing can therefore possess epistemic significance that is not reducible to the semantic content of its final symbolic expression. This distinction provides a conceptual basis for subsequent work on epistemic provenance, artificial intelligence, and forms of knowledge production in which highly developed symbolic outputs can increasingly be generated without equivalent participation in the processes through which human knowing emerges.

Keywords: epistemic genesis; dependent origination; contingency; pre-articulated apprehension; pre-symbolic cognition; symbolic formation; epistemic trajectory; tacit knowing; relational epistemology; Generative Relational theory

Discussion Paper Note

This paper is a conceptual and exploratory inquiry into the genesis of knowing before its stabilization as an explicit proposition, definition, explanation, or other symbolic epistemic output. Its principal object is the epistemic trajectory through which something becomes apprehensible, differentiable, and eventually articulable within a historically situated subject. The analysis therefore concerns the formation of knowing rather than a general theory of propositional knowledge, justification, truth, or belief.

The paper begins from a distinction between an epistemic result and the process through which that result becomes possible. A proposition can preserve a conclusion, distinction, or explicit judgment while preserving only a limited portion of the history through which the relevant epistemic organization emerged. Encounter, prior experience, affective response, failed articulation, contingent association, practical involvement, social relation, and historical context can contribute to the formation of knowing without remaining recoverable from its final symbolic expression. The present inquiry examines the philosophical significance of this difference.

The term “before” in the title is primarily genetic and analytical. It does not imply a universal chronological sequence in which an autonomous pre-symbolic realm always precedes language. Subjects ordinarily encounter the world through perceptual, conceptual, linguistic, social, and historical organizations that are already operative. Existing symbolic structures can therefore participate in the genesis of an epistemic event whose eventual content has not yet received a stable symbolic form. The relevant distinction concerns the emergence of a new articulation within an already structured epistemic history.

The expression “pre-symbolic” is consequently used with substantial qualification. The paper distinguishes among what is not yet symbolized, what is only partially symbolizable under available epistemic conditions, and what might be claimed to resist complete symbolic preservation. These categories should not be treated as equivalent. The argument requires primarily the first two. It does not depend upon a general metaphysical thesis that some domain of knowledge is intrinsically beyond language or representation.

The concept of *pre-articulated apprehension* is used where greater precision is required. It refers provisionally to an epistemic condition in which a subject has become responsive to a difference, discrepancy, tension, attraction, disturbance, or other form of significance before possessing an adequate and stable formulation of what has been apprehended. Such apprehension need not constitute completed knowledge. It can instead mark a change in epistemic organization from which more determinate knowing later develops.

Symbolic formation is treated as an active component of this development. Articulation can differentiate a previously unstable experience, make comparison possible, stabilize a distinction, expose an assumption, generate a question, or reorganize the phenomenon toward which inquiry is directed. The paper therefore does not assume that language simply transfers a completed pre-existing content into communicable form. Symbolization can participate in the production and transformation of what subsequently becomes available as an epistemic result.

The concept of *epistemic trajectory* refers to the temporally extended organization through which such transformations occur. A trajectory can include prior dispositions, encounters, incomplete interpretations, failed formulations, questions, responses from other subjects, revisions, symbolic innovations, and later stabilization. No fixed sequence is proposed. Different forms of knowing can emerge through substantially different trajectories, and some epistemic results can be acquired without reproducing the generative history through which they were first developed.

Contingency is central to the inquiry but should not be identified with randomness or absence of conditioning. An encounter can be contingent with respect to a subject’s intention while remaining effective only because a historically developed epistemic organization allows its significance to be recognized. A conversation, accidental comparison, unexpected observation, change of setting, practical failure, or apparently minor event can redirect an epistemic trajectory when it enters a configuration capable of sustaining the new relation. Contingency is therefore examined through its interaction with prior conditions rather than through opposition to structure.

The paper draws comparatively upon Buddhist accounts of dependent origination. Dependent origination is relevant because it provides a conceptual resource for examining emergence without requiring an independently self-sufficient bearer of the resulting phenomenon. Its use in the paper is deliberately limited. Dependent origination is not reduced to a generic theory of causation, and Buddhist doctrinal claims are not assumed to be interchangeable with contemporary epistemology, phenomenology, psychology, or systems theory.

A related comparative resource is provided by Yogācāra accounts of seeds, manifestation, and recursive conditioning. These accounts offer a historically important vocabulary for considering how dispositions can remain operative without being manifest in the same form at every moment and how manifest activity can alter conditions for later manifestation. The comparison is structural and exploratory. It does not identify epistemic dispositions with Yogācāra seeds or translate Buddhist soteriological concepts directly into psychological variables.

The paper also draws upon phenomenology, pragmatism, tacit knowing, and process-oriented approaches where they illuminate different aspects of the genesis of articulation. Phenomenological resources are relevant to situated and pre-reflective disclosure. Pragmatist theories are relevant to the formation of problems from initially indeterminate situations. Accounts of tacit knowing are relevant to epistemic organization that exceeds what can be fully stated at a particular moment. These traditions are used comparatively and retain their different theoretical commitments.

The Generative Relational perspective functions as an organizing framework for these materials. Knowing is examined through evolving relations among subjects, phenomena, histories, symbolic organizations, practices, environments, and contingent encounters. The term “relation” is employed as an analytical convenience and does not establish a claim that all epistemic phenomena reduce to a single relational ontology. The paper likewise does not propose a complete formal model of epistemic genesis.

Particular attention is given to the epistemic significance of provenance. Provenance in this paper concerns more than bibliographic attribution or the identification of an information source. It includes the generative history through which an epistemic result acquired significance within a subject or community. Two symbolically equivalent propositions can occupy different epistemic positions when they arise from different histories of encounter, judgment, practice, interpretation, and transformation. The extent to which such differences should affect epistemic evaluation remains an open question.

The analysis therefore distinguishes symbolic equivalence from trajectory equivalence. Identical or semantically equivalent expressions do not imply identical histories of knowing. This distinction does not establish that an extended or difficult trajectory is intrinsically superior to testimony, instruction, collaboration, inheritance, or other forms of epistemic dependence. Human knowledge necessarily relies upon results whose complete generative histories cannot be individually reproduced.

The paper also avoids romanticizing contingency, silence, intuition, tacit knowledge, or pre-articulated experience. An inability to articulate something can reflect epistemic novelty, insufficient conceptual resources, confusion, error, or other conditions. Silence can preserve a relation that exceeds a particular formulation, and it can also communicate nothing epistemically relevant. The meaning of an absence of explicit expression depends upon the history and relational configuration in which it occurs.

For the same reason, concise or apparently ordinary expressions should not be assigned greater epistemic depth merely because they arise from long practice. A highly developed epistemic trajectory can terminate in a simple proposition, an incomplete statement, a revision of an earlier question, or no stable propositional result. The philosophical point concerns the possible non-equivalence between symbolic output and generative history rather than a presumption that one form of output indicates greater wisdom.

Religious and scriptural materials can provide important cases for examining this distinction because many traditions preserve dialogues, circumstances, interlocutors, repeated questions, disputes, practices, and narrative settings alongside compact doctrinal formulations. Such materials should be interpreted within their own textual and historical contexts. Their use in the present paper is illustrative and comparative rather than evidence for a universal structure of epistemic development.

The normative implications of the argument remain deliberately open. If a proposition fails to preserve the complete trajectory through which knowing emerged, it does not follow that every epistemic

trajectory ought to be preserved, reconstructed, or reproduced. Nor does the analysis establish that knowledge acquired through testimony, teaching, archives, computational systems, or artificial intelligence is epistemically deficient merely because the recipient does not reproduce the original trajectory. These questions require additional criteria concerning understanding, judgment, provenance, education, subject formation, and the purposes of the relevant epistemic practice.

Artificial intelligence provides an important later context for the inquiry. Contemporary systems make especially visible the possibility that sophisticated symbolic outputs can be generated without an equivalent human history of encounter, uncertainty, question formation, practice, and transformation. The present paper does not attempt to determine whether such outputs constitute knowledge, understanding, or wisdom in any general sense. It develops the prior conceptual distinction between symbolic result and epistemic genesis that must be clarified before those questions can be addressed adequately.

The relation between this paper and the preceding study of curiosity should also remain clear. The preceding inquiry examined how a phenomenon becomes questionable and how epistemic desire can emerge within a historically situated subject-world relation. The present paper begins from that threshold and examines the subsequent and partially overlapping genesis through which epistemic significance can become differentiated, articulated, and stabilized. The two analyses are therefore continuous while retaining distinct principal objects.

The present paper should ultimately be read as a preliminary theory of an epistemic problem-space rather than as a completed account of knowing. Its principal contribution is to preserve distinctions that can disappear when the final proposition is treated as an adequate representation of the epistemic process that produced it. It asks what becomes visible when knowing is studied through its emergence, contingency, relational conditions, symbolic transformation, and history, while leaving stronger metaphysical, empirical, and normative conclusions available for subsequent inquiry.

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1 Introduction

Epistemic inquiry is frequently represented through its articulated results. A conclusion is stated as a proposition, a distinction is stabilized through a concept, an observation is incorporated into an explanation, or an insight is preserved in a textual form. Such results are indispensable to communication, criticism, transmission, and cumulative inquiry. They can nevertheless obscure a prior philosophical problem. Before a proposition becomes available as a stable epistemic object, a subject may already have undergone a substantial process of encounter, differentiation, uncertainty, attention, interpretation, and conceptual transformation. The final formulation preserves an epistemic result while only partially displaying the process through which that result became possible.

The present paper examines this generative interval. Its principal question concerns how knowing emerges before it becomes stabilized in a proposition, definition, explicit judgment, or comparably determinate symbolic form. The problem includes cases in which a subject recognizes that an existing interpretation is insufficient before being able to identify the insufficiency precisely; experiences a relation as significant before possessing an adequate concept for it; or develops a distinction gradually through repeated encounter, failed formulation, comparison, and revision. In such cases, epistemic change has begun before its eventual symbolic result has been completed.

This problem should be distinguished from the general question of whether knowledge is propositional. The present inquiry does not attempt to replace propositional accounts of knowledge with a comprehensive theory of non-propositional cognition. Its object is genetic rather than classificatory. The relevant issue is whether the process through which an explicit epistemic result emerges can contain epistemically significant stages and relations that are absent from, or only incompletely preserved in, the final result.

Several established philosophical approaches provide resources for examining this problem. Dewey's theory of inquiry describes the formation of a determinate problem through the transformation of an initially indeterminate situation [4]. Polanyi's account of tacit knowing emphasizes that epistemic activity can depend upon integrations and discriminations that exceed what the knower can explicitly state at a particular moment [13]. Gendlin's analysis of experiencing and concept formation examines how symbolic articulation can emerge through interaction with experience that has not yet acquired an adequate conceptual form [5]. These approaches differ substantially in method and philosophical commitment, yet each complicates a model in which a fully articulated epistemic content exists at the beginning of inquiry and is subsequently transmitted without transformation.

The present paper develops this problem through the concepts of *epistemic trajectory*, *pre-articulated apprehension*, *contingency*, and *symbolic formation*. An epistemic trajectory designates the temporally extended process through which historically formed capacities, encounters, interpretations, questions, revisions, and articulations contribute to an epistemic result. Pre-articulated apprehension designates a more specific condition in which something has become epistemically operative for a subject while its conceptual or linguistic form remains unstable. Symbolic formation concerns the subsequent process through which distinctions become articulable, comparable, criticizable, and capable of entering more stable structures of knowledge.

The term *pre-symbolic* in the title requires particular qualification. It does not designate a pure domain existing independently of every prior symbolic mediation. Human subjects ordinarily encounter phenomena through languages, concepts, perceptual habits, social practices, inherited distinctions, and histories that are already structured symbolically. A new epistemic development can therefore be pre-symbolic with respect to its *emerging articulation* while remaining conditioned by earlier symbolic organizations.

Three cases should consequently remain distinct. Something can be *not yet symbolized* because the subject has not developed an adequate formulation. It can be *partially symbolizable* where existing symbolic resources preserve some dimensions of an epistemic event while leaving others unstable or implicit. A stronger claim of *symbolic irreducibility* would hold that some dimension cannot in principle be exhaustively preserved through symbolic articulation. The argument of this paper depends primarily

upon the first two cases. It leaves the metaphysical status of the third open.

This distinction also changes the role assigned to symbolic articulation. Symbolization is not treated as the passive transcription of an already completed inner content. The production of a concept, question, distinction, analogy, or proposition can reorganize what the subject has apprehended. Formulation can make a previously diffuse difference stable, disclose an assumption, permit comparison across cases, or transform the problem toward which inquiry is directed. Symbolic expression can therefore be generative within knowing rather than merely subsequent to it.

The epistemic trajectory leading to such articulation can contain substantial contingency. A question can emerge from an encounter that was not deliberately sought. A comparison across previously unrelated domains can expose a difference that had remained unavailable within either domain separately. A conversation can make an implicit assumption visible. A practical failure can produce a distinction that would not have arisen under uninterrupted success. A change in place, historical circumstance, social relation, or affective orientation can alter which dimensions of a phenomenon become epistemically salient.

Contingency in this sense does not imply absence of conditions. An unplanned event becomes epistemically consequential through the organization into which it enters. A chance encounter can remain insignificant for one subject and become transformative for another because their prior histories, conceptual resources, practices, and concerns differ. The relevant philosophical problem therefore concerns the relation between conditioning and contingency rather than a contrast between complete determination and unstructured randomness.

Buddhist accounts of dependent origination provide a particularly important comparative resource for this problem. Dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) characterizes phenomena through conditioned emergence rather than through complete self-sufficiency. Within Buddhist traditions the doctrine operates within much broader analyses of suffering, causation, continuity, cognition, karma, and liberation [7]. The present paper does not extract dependent origination from those contexts and present it as a generic synonym for relational causation. It asks more narrowly whether its structure can assist in conceptualizing knowing as an event whose emergence depends upon a plurality of conditions without requiring a single self-sufficient origin.

The comparison is especially relevant to the status of the knowing subject. If an epistemic event develops through accumulated dispositions, previous symbolic formations, material and social environments, relations with other subjects, and contingent encounters, then the explicit subject who eventually states a proposition need not be regarded as the sole origin of the knowing that proposition expresses. The subject remains an active participant in inquiry, while that activity itself has conditions and a history.

Yogācāra philosophy provides a more specific comparative vocabulary for considering temporally extended conditioning. Accounts of *ālayavijñāna*, seeds, dispositions, and manifestation were developed in relation to problems of continuity, cognition, karma, and the absence of a permanent self [9]. Later experiences can emerge from conditions whose effects are not continuously manifest in explicit consciousness, while activity can in turn alter conditions for subsequent experience. The present paper uses this structure cautiously. Epistemic dispositions are not identified with Yogācāra seeds, and a contemporary theory of inquiry cannot be derived directly from Buddhist soteriological categories.

The value of the comparison lies instead in a more general philosophical possibility: manifestation need not constitute the beginning of the conditions that make manifestation possible. An explicit proposition can appear at the end of a trajectory whose operative organization extends further into the subject's history. Likewise, the stabilization of an epistemic result can modify the conditions from which later knowing emerges.

This recursive relation is central to the account developed here. Knowing can change the organization through which subsequent knowing becomes possible. A new distinction changes what can later be noticed. A failed interpretation can change sensitivity to evidence. An encounter with another conceptual system can alter the boundaries of familiar categories. A proposition therefore functions both as an epistemic result and, under some conditions, as a new condition for future epistemic development.

The trajectory is also relational. Human knowing ordinarily develops through other subjects, inher-

ited texts, institutions, technical objects, environments, languages, practices, and histories. An insight that appears individually can depend upon materials accumulated across many prior relations. Conversely, the same external resource can generate different epistemic developments depending upon the trajectory into which it enters.

A Generative Relational perspective is used to organize these interactions. The framework treats an epistemic event through evolving relations among the subject, encountered phenomena, prior organizations, symbolic resources, practices, historical conditions, and contingent events. Its role in the present paper is methodological. The argument does not require relation to be accepted as a universal ontological primitive, nor does it assume that every epistemic event can be reduced to one formal generative mechanism.

This perspective makes a further distinction visible: symbolic equivalence does not entail equivalence of epistemic trajectory. Two subjects can state the same proposition after very different histories. One can acquire it directly through testimony. Another can arrive at it after prolonged observation, failed hypotheses, disagreement, conceptual revision, and changes in practice. The semantic content of the resulting statement can coincide while the epistemic organization surrounding that statement differs.

No hierarchy follows automatically from this difference. Testimony, instruction, textual inheritance, collaboration, and division of epistemic labor are indispensable to human knowledge. Reconstructing the original trajectory of every inherited proposition would be impossible and frequently pointless. The distinction instead raises a more precise question: which features of an epistemic trajectory matter for understanding, judgment, future inquiry, or the meaning of an epistemic result within a particular subject or community?

This question leads to the problem of epistemic provenance. Provenance is usually associated with the source or transmission history of information. The present paper considers a broader form of *generative provenance*: the history of conditions, encounters, differentiations, and transformations through which an epistemic result became possible and significant. Such provenance need not be fully reconstructible, and its epistemic importance can vary across contexts. It nevertheless cannot be inferred from symbolic content alone.

The distinction is especially visible in philosophical and religious traditions that preserve dialogues, circumstances, interlocutors, practices, misunderstandings, repeated questions, and transformations alongside concise doctrinal formulations. Such forms of preservation suggest that an epistemic tradition can retain more than a collection of conclusions. It can also retain, although inevitably selectively, records of how a distinction became intelligible within a particular historical and relational process.

The present paper does not assume that narrative preservation provides transparent access to the original epistemic event. Textual records are themselves symbolic constructions shaped by transmission, editing, genre, institutional history, and interpretation. Their relevance lies in showing that the relation between knowing and its final proposition can itself become an object of preservation.

This problem acquires additional significance under contemporary conditions of artificially mediated knowledge production. Artificial systems can generate highly developed propositions, explanations, conceptual distinctions, and arguments without reproducing an equivalent human trajectory of encounter, uncertainty, practical transformation, or question formation. This development does not by itself establish that such outputs lack knowledge, understanding, or epistemic value. It makes the distinction between symbolic result and epistemic genesis increasingly difficult to ignore.

Artificial intelligence remains a boundary condition rather than the principal object of the present paper. A later analysis can ask what occurs when symbolically sophisticated knowledge production becomes increasingly separable from human epistemic formation. The present inquiry addresses the prior conceptual problem: what, if anything, belongs to knowing before the proposition through which the result is eventually expressed?

The paper makes five principal contributions. First, it distinguishes an epistemic result from the trajectory through which that result emerges. Second, it develops pre-articulated apprehension as a concept for epistemic change occurring before stable formulation while avoiding a general doctrine of language-independent cognition. Third, it analyzes contingency as a conditioned component of epistemic gene-

sis rather than as unstructured randomness. Fourth, it uses dependent origination and Yogācāra seed–manifestation structures as carefully delimited comparative resources for understanding emergence, continuity, and recursive conditioning. Fifth, it develops the concept of generative provenance to identify aspects of epistemic history that can be absent from the semantic content of a final proposition.

These contributions remain deliberately limited. The paper does not offer a complete theory of knowledge, a universal sequence of cognition, a neuroscientific model of pre-symbolic processing, or a general metaphysics of ineffability. It does not establish that extended epistemic trajectories are intrinsically superior to compressed ones, or that a proposition is epistemically deficient whenever its generative history is unavailable. It also does not equate Buddhist theories of cognition with contemporary epistemology.

The remainder of the paper develops the argument in stages. The next section clarifies the conceptual distinctions among epistemic result, epistemic trajectory, pre-articulated apprehension, symbolic formation, and generative provenance. A subsequent literature review examines philosophical resources from dependent origination, Yogācāra, pragmatism, phenomenology, tacit knowing, and theories of experiential articulation. The central analytical sections then develop the relations among prior organization, contingent encounter, pre-articulated differentiation, symbolic stabilization, and recursive epistemic transformation. Later sections examine what is preserved and what can be lost when an epistemic trajectory is represented primarily through its final symbolic result. The concluding discussion identifies the implications for epistemic provenance and subsequent research on artificially mediated knowledge production.

2 Conceptual Architecture of Epistemic Genesis

This section defines the principal concepts used throughout the paper and clarifies the relations among them. The objective is to distinguish the epistemic result eventually expressed in symbolic form from the trajectory through which that result emerges. Particular attention is given to pre-articulated apprehension, symbolic formation, contingency, and generative provenance. These distinctions are analytical. They do not imply that the corresponding processes occur as discrete or universally ordered stages.

The term *knowing* is used in a deliberately broad processual sense. It does not designate only propositional knowledge or a completed epistemic state. It also refers to the development through which a subject becomes capable of distinguishing, interpreting, articulating, and stabilizing an epistemic relation. This usage allows the paper to examine the genesis of explicit knowledge without presupposing that every epistemically significant event is already propositional.

2.1 Epistemic Result and Epistemic Trajectory

The first distinction concerns the difference between an epistemic result and the trajectory through which that result becomes available.

An *epistemic result* is a relatively stabilized outcome of inquiry that can be expressed, communicated, preserved, compared, or evaluated. It can take the form of a proposition, distinction, classification, explanation, definition, judgment, model, interpretation, or other sufficiently determinate symbolic object.

An *epistemic trajectory* is the temporally extended process through which such a result becomes possible for a subject or community. A trajectory can include prior conceptual organization, perceptual experience, practical involvement, memory, affect, social relation, failed interpretation, conversation, comparison, question formation, revision, and symbolic rearticulation.

The distinction does not imply that every trajectory culminates in a stable result. Some inquiries terminate without resolution. Others generate a reformulated question, a recognition of insufficiency, or a change in orientation rather than a determinate proposition. The concept of trajectory therefore concerns epistemic development more broadly than successful propositional completion.

Conversely, the same epistemic result can be reached through different trajectories. A proposition can be learned through testimony, derived through formal reasoning, discovered experimentally, encountered in a text, or developed through prolonged practical experience. These routes can converge seman-

tically while differing substantially in the histories of discrimination, judgment, failure, interpretation, and transformation through which the result became available.

The distinction is central to the present inquiry because symbolic identity does not establish trajectory identity. A final proposition can preserve the content of a conclusion without preserving the conditions through which that conclusion acquired significance.

2.2 Pre-Articulated Apprehension

The term *pre-articulated apprehension* designates an epistemic condition in which a phenomenon has begun to affect the subject's organization of attention, distinction, or interpretation before an adequate symbolic formulation has become available.

Such apprehension can take different forms. A subject can sense that an argument is unstable without identifying the precise source of the problem. An observation can appear anomalous before the relevant category is available. A relation can seem important without yet being conceptually differentiated. A practical encounter can produce a persistent sense of mismatch that only later becomes a determinate question.

Pre-articulated apprehension should not be treated as completed knowledge hidden beneath language. The subject may possess only a partial, unstable, or poorly differentiated epistemic orientation. Subsequent articulation can substantially transform what was initially apprehended.

The concept therefore occupies an intermediate position. It refers to a state that is epistemically more determinate than complete indifference while less determinate than stable conceptual or propositional articulation.

This distinction is necessary because the beginning of epistemic change and the beginning of explicit formulation need not coincide. A subject can already be responding to a difference before being able to state what the difference is.

2.3 The Scope of the Pre-Symbolic

The term *pre-symbolic* is used in this paper only with respect to the emergence of a particular articulation. It should not be understood as designating a domain wholly independent of language, concepts, history, or previous symbolic mediation.

A subject who encounters something that has not yet been articulated does not thereby encounter the world without prior symbolic organization. Perception, expectation, attention, and distinction can already be shaped by language, education, inherited categories, institutional practices, and previous epistemic histories.

Three cases must therefore remain conceptually distinct.

The first is the *not-yet-symbolized*. An epistemic difference has begun to become operative, but no adequate symbolic formulation has yet been produced.

The second is the *partially symbolizable*. Some dimensions of the epistemic event can be articulated, while others remain unstable, tacit, or poorly differentiated under available symbolic resources.

The third is the *symbolically irreducible*. This stronger category would apply where some dimension of knowing is claimed to resist complete symbolic preservation in principle.

The present argument depends primarily upon the first two. It does not require a metaphysical commitment to intrinsic ineffability or to a domain of cognition that is permanently inaccessible to symbolic articulation.

This distinction also prevents a common conceptual compression. The absence of a current formulation does not establish permanent inexpressibility, and the later availability of a formulation does not imply that the earlier epistemic state already contained the final proposition in completed form.

2.4 Symbolic Formation

Symbolic formation refers to the process through which an epistemic difference becomes sufficiently articulated to enter a more stable conceptual, linguistic, mathematical, graphical, or otherwise symbolic form.

The role of symbolic formation is productive rather than merely representational. A concept can separate dimensions that were previously experienced together. A question can convert diffuse disturbance into a determinate problem. A diagram can disclose a structural relation that was difficult to maintain in verbal form. A mathematical formalization can establish distinctions that were previously only qualitative.

Symbolization therefore changes the epistemic configuration through which the phenomenon is understood. The final expression is not always a transparent container into which a completed content is transferred. The act of formulation can contribute to the determination of the content itself.

This point is especially important where inquiry involves repeated reformulation. An initial concept can prove too broad. A question can conceal multiple explanatory problems. A symbolic distinction can expose an assumption that was previously invisible. The resulting epistemic trajectory can proceed through several temporary stabilizations before a more durable articulation emerges.

The term *stabilization* is therefore preferable to *completion*. An articulated proposition is stable enough to support communication, criticism, transmission, or further inference, but it remains revisable within later epistemic relations.

2.5 Symbolic Stabilization and Epistemic Compression

Symbolic stabilization necessarily selects from the trajectory through which it emerges. A proposition can preserve a distinction while omitting the failed attempts that made the distinction intelligible. A definition can retain the result of conceptual clarification while omitting the encounters that exposed the inadequacy of earlier categories. An explanation can preserve causal relations while omitting the sequence through which those relations first became salient.

The relation between trajectory and final expression can therefore be understood as a form of *epistemic compression*. The term is used here with caution. Compression does not imply that the original trajectory can always be reconstructed from the final result. In many cases, the relation is irreversible. The symbolic result functions less like a reversible encoding of the trajectory and more like a stabilized remainder of a larger generative process.

This asymmetry has two consequences.

First, a proposition can travel independently of much of the history that generated it. It can be copied, taught, translated, cited, or computationally processed without reproducing the original epistemic trajectory.

Second, the loss of trajectory does not necessarily invalidate the proposition. A mathematical theorem remains valid when the reader does not reconstruct the historical circumstances of its discovery. A scientific result can remain usable even when most users do not reproduce the experiments through which it was established.

The philosophical issue is therefore not whether compression occurs. It is which dimensions of the generative history remain epistemically relevant under different conditions.

2.6 Conditioning and Contingency

The genesis of knowing depends upon conditions, but conditioned emergence does not imply complete determination. This distinction is central to the account of contingency developed in the paper.

A subject enters inquiry through historically formed capacities, concepts, expectations, practices, social relations, and material environments. These conditions shape what can be perceived, distinguished, interpreted, and articulated. They establish a field of possible epistemic development.

A particular trajectory nevertheless need not be deducible from that field. An unexpected encounter can introduce a relation that had not previously been the object of inquiry. A chance conversation can provide a concept that reorganizes a long-standing difficulty. A practical failure can expose an assumption that had remained invisible under ordinary conditions.

Contingency therefore concerns the occurrence and configuration of events whose epistemic effects were not completely specified by the subject's prior organization. It does not imply absence of causation or structure.

The effect of a contingent encounter depends precisely upon prior conditions. The same event can be transformative for one subject and irrelevant to another. A concept encountered accidentally can become generative only where an existing trajectory makes its significance intelligible.

Conditioning and contingency are therefore complementary. Prior organization makes certain epistemic developments possible, while contingent encounters contribute to which possibilities become manifest.

2.7 Dependent Emergence

The term *dependent emergence* is used as a provisional bridge between the paper's epistemic framework and the comparative analysis of dependent origination developed later.

An epistemic event is dependently emergent when its occurrence cannot be adequately attributed to a single self-sufficient source. The resulting knowledge depends upon a configuration of conditions that can include the subject's history, symbolic resources, encountered phenomena, other persons, material environments, practices, institutions, and contingent events.

This formulation does not eliminate agency. The subject can compare, interpret, judge, reject, revise, and formulate. These activities remain important components of knowing. Their occurrence, however, is itself conditioned by capacities and relations whose formation extends beyond the immediate act of judgment.

Dependent emergence therefore avoids two opposing simplifications. The first treats the explicit knower as the autonomous origin of an epistemic result. The second treats the subject as a passive location in which external causes produce knowledge. The present framework instead examines agency as one operative component within a broader generative configuration.

This conceptual structure provides the point of contact with Buddhist accounts of dependent origination while leaving the doctrinal comparison for the literature review. The present paper does not identify dependent emergence with the Buddhist doctrine. It uses the former as an epistemic concept whose relation to the latter must be established through analysis rather than assumed terminologically.

2.8 Recursive Epistemic Formation

Epistemic trajectories are recursive because their results can become conditions for later epistemic development.

A newly stabilized concept changes what the subject can subsequently distinguish. A previous inquiry can modify attention toward evidence. A failed explanation can generate sensitivity to assumptions. A newly acquired symbolic system can make previously inaccessible relations available to analysis.

The trajectory therefore does not simply terminate in a proposition. The proposition, distinction, or other epistemic result can be incorporated into the subject's organization and thereby alter the conditions of future inquiry.

This recursive relation applies at collective levels as well. Concepts are preserved in texts, practices, institutions, and technical systems. Later subjects inherit these results without reproducing their complete original trajectories. Inherited symbolic formations then become conditions for new epistemic events.

The history of knowledge consequently consists partly in repeated movements between stabilization and renewed generation. A result produced through one trajectory becomes a condition within another.

2.9 Generative Provenance

The concept of *generative provenance* identifies the history through which an epistemic result becomes possible and significant within a particular epistemic configuration.

Generative provenance differs from source attribution. Knowing that a proposition came from a particular author, article, institution, or database provides one form of provenance. Generative provenance concerns a broader history that can include the problem from which the result emerged, the encounters that made the problem salient, the concepts available at the time, the revisions through which distinctions developed, and the relations among subjects and practices that contributed to stabilization.

The concept also differs from causal exhaustiveness. A complete causal history of any epistemic event would be practically unavailable and theoretically unbounded. Generative provenance concerns those elements of the trajectory that become relevant to explaining how an epistemic result acquired its form, significance, or relation to future inquiry.

Different purposes can make different aspects of provenance relevant. In science, experimental and methodological provenance can be important for evaluation and reproducibility. In philosophy, the conceptual trajectory of a distinction can matter for understanding the problem it resolves. In religious or practical traditions, the relation among teaching, practice, encounter, and transformation can affect how an apparently simple expression is interpreted.

Generative provenance is therefore context-sensitive. The framework does not assume that every epistemic result must preserve the same quantity or type of historical information.

2.10 Symbolic Equivalence and Trajectory Non-Equivalence

The preceding distinctions support an important consequence: symbolic equivalence does not entail epistemic trajectory equivalence.

Two subjects can produce the same sentence while occupying different epistemic relations to that sentence. One can repeat a proposition without understanding its inferential consequences. Another can possess a detailed conceptual understanding. A third can arrive at the same formulation after a practical or transformative trajectory in which the proposition reorganizes a broader field of experience.

This difference should not be reduced to a binary distinction between genuine and defective knowing. Epistemic relations can vary along multiple dimensions, including conceptual understanding, practical competence, inferential ability, historical awareness, experiential integration, and capacity for subsequent inquiry.

The final symbolic expression therefore underdetermines the epistemic position of its producer or recipient. Additional information concerning trajectory, practice, relation, and context can be required where those dimensions matter to the object of evaluation.

The claim is particularly important for concise statements. Brevity does not indicate epistemic shallowness, just as complexity of expression does not establish epistemic depth. A long trajectory can terminate in a short formulation, while a sophisticated symbolic output can be produced through a comparatively compressed trajectory.

2.11 Preservation and Loss

The distinction between epistemic result and generative provenance raises a problem of preservation.

What should be preserved when knowledge is transmitted? The minimal answer is often the stabilized epistemic result together with sufficient justification, method, or evidence for its intended use. This form of preservation supports efficient transmission and cumulative inquiry.

Other contexts can require more. A conceptual distinction can be difficult to understand without the problem to which it responds. A historical argument can be distorted when detached from the circumstances in which its categories were formed. A practical teaching can become misleading when preserved as an isolated formula without the relational setting that governed its application.

Preserving additional trajectory information can therefore have epistemic value. Such preservation remains necessarily selective. No archive can contain the totality of relations through which knowing emerged.

The relevant question is not whether the whole trajectory should be retained. It is which parts of the trajectory become necessary for preserving the epistemic function, intelligibility, or revisability of the resulting symbolic form.

This question will later become important for the analysis of dialogue, scriptural preservation, and artificially generated knowledge-like outputs.

2.12 Boundary of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed in this section establishes several distinctions without resolving the stronger metaphysical and normative problems to which they can lead.

It distinguishes epistemic result from epistemic trajectory, while leaving open how much trajectory information is necessary for particular forms of knowledge. It introduces pre-articulated apprehension without claiming a universal language-independent cognitive substrate. It distinguishes conditioning from contingency without providing a complete causal theory of epistemic events. It introduces dependent emergence without identifying it doctrinally with Buddhist dependent origination. It develops generative provenance without claiming that every epistemic history should be preserved or reconstructed.

The framework also leaves open the normative ranking of epistemic trajectories. A longer trajectory is not necessarily better than a shorter one. Direct instruction can be more epistemically appropriate than independent discovery. Testimony can provide genuine knowledge without reproducing the trajectory of the original knower. Symbolic compression can support rather than diminish epistemic generativity by allowing later subjects to begin from inherited results.

The relevant issue throughout the paper is therefore structural rather than evaluative: different trajectories can generate symbolically equivalent results while preserving different relations to history, meaning, judgment, and future inquiry.

The next section situates these distinctions within the relevant philosophical literature. It examines Buddhist accounts of dependent origination and Yogācāra conditioning alongside pragmatist, phenomenological, tacit, and process-oriented approaches to the formation of epistemic articulation.

3 Philosophical Resources for Epistemic Genesis

The conceptual distinctions developed in the preceding section intersect with several philosophical traditions concerned with conditioned emergence, pre-reflective organization, problem formation, tacit knowing, and the transition toward explicit articulation. This section reviews those traditions according to the specific explanatory resources they provide for the present inquiry.

The purpose of the review is comparative rather than synthetic. Buddhist accounts of dependent origination and Yogācāra theories of latent dispositions arise within doctrinal and soteriological contexts substantially different from modern theories of inquiry. Pragmatism is primarily concerned with the transformation of problematic situations. Phenomenology investigates embodied and situated disclosure. Polanyi addresses tacit dimensions of knowing, while Gendlin develops a process-oriented account of the relation between experiencing and conceptual formulation. Process philosophy provides a still broader metaphysical vocabulary of becoming and relational constitution.

These traditions should therefore remain distinguishable. Their relevance lies in the possibility that each illuminates a different dimension of the trajectory through which an epistemic result becomes articulated.

3.1 Dependent Origination and Conditioned Emergence

Buddhist accounts of dependent origination provide the first comparative resource for the present framework. The doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* is central to Buddhist analyses of conditioned existence and

describes phenomena as arising through causes and conditions rather than through independent self-sufficiency [7]. Its doctrinal significance extends far beyond epistemology and includes analyses of suffering, continuity, causation, impermanence, and liberation. Any use of dependent origination within a theory of knowing must therefore preserve this difference of scope.

The relevance of dependent origination to the present paper lies in a limited structural feature. An epistemic event need not be attributed to one self-sufficient origin. What eventually appears as a judgment, distinction, or proposition can depend upon prior dispositions, conceptual resources, perceptual capacities, material circumstances, relations with other subjects, and contingent encounters. The explicit act of articulation can be one condition within this process without constituting its absolute beginning.

This structure is particularly useful for resisting an overly punctual account of knowing. If a proposition is treated as the moment at which knowledge first appears, the history through which the proposition became possible can disappear from analysis. A conditioned-emergence perspective instead permits an epistemic result to be located within a temporally extended configuration.

Dependent origination should not, however, be reduced to the generic statement that everything has causes. Buddhist discussions of dependent arising concern specific problems concerning conditioned phenomena and the absence of independent self-existence. The present paper consequently does not identify its concept of *dependent emergence* with *pratītyasamutpāda*. The former is an epistemic analytical concept; the latter remains a Buddhist doctrine whose philosophical implications cannot be exhausted by the use made of it here.

The comparison nevertheless establishes an important possibility. The absence of a self-sufficient origin does not entail the absence of order or causal constraint. A phenomenon can be conditionally generated while remaining intelligible through the relations that sustain its emergence. This possibility provides a conceptual basis for examining epistemic genesis without requiring either an autonomous originating subject or an unstructured account of contingency.

3.2 Yogācāra Dispositions and Manifestation

Yogācāra philosophy provides a more specific comparative resource for temporally extended conditioning. Theories of *ālayavijñāna*, karmic seeds (*bīja*), and impressions (*vāsanā*) were developed partly in response to problems concerning continuity, karmic efficacy, cognition, and the Buddhist rejection of an enduring substantial self [9]. Seeds and impressions can function as dispositions or potentialities for later experiences and perceptions rather than remaining continuously manifest in explicit consciousness.

The structure is relevant to the distinction between prior epistemic organization and manifest articulation. Conditions can remain operative without appearing continuously in the same phenomenal or conceptual form. A later manifestation can therefore depend upon a history whose relevant organization is not exhausted by what is present in explicit consciousness at the moment of manifestation.

This feature provides a useful comparative model for the distinction developed in Section 2. An explicit epistemic result can emerge from capacities, dispositions, memories, habits, symbolic formations, and previous encounters that are not themselves simultaneously represented in the final act of articulation.

The comparison also provides a model of recursive conditioning. In Yogācāra accounts, activity can generate or modify dispositions that contribute to later experience [9]. The present framework identifies a structurally related recursion within inquiry: previous knowing modifies the organization through which later phenomena are encountered, differentiated, and articulated.

The analogy should remain restricted. Epistemic dispositions are not Yogācāra seeds, and the recursive transformation of inquiry should not be presented as a translation of Buddhist karmic theory. Yogācāra concepts operate within distinct accounts of cognition, karma, no-self, and liberation. Their value here is comparative: they demonstrate a philosophically developed way of thinking about latent conditioning, manifestation, and recursive transformation without requiring an enduring substantial bearer of every disposition.

A further implication concerns manifestation itself. What becomes manifest at a particular moment need not mark the beginning of the conditions that produced it. This principle is central to the present

paper's treatment of symbolic articulation. The proposition is an event within an epistemic trajectory rather than necessarily the first event of knowing.

3.3 Pragmatist Accounts of Problem Formation

Dewey's theory of inquiry provides a particularly close modern precedent for the claim that explicit problem formulation can emerge from a less determinate epistemic condition. In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, inquiry begins with an indeterminate situation and proceeds through the constitution of a problem sufficiently determinate to guide further investigation [4].

This formulation is important because the problem does not simply pre-exist the inquiry in completed form. Inquiry participates in determining what the problem is. An initial sense of doubtfulness, conflict, or indeterminacy can therefore precede the explicit formulation that later organizes investigation.

Dewey's account supports two distinctions central to the present paper. First, epistemic disturbance and symbolic problem formulation need not coincide temporally. Second, articulation can transform the epistemic situation rather than merely describe it. Forming the problem is itself an epistemic achievement.

The pragmatist approach also resists an exclusively internal representation of inquiry. The indeterminate situation concerns an organism or agent involved in a world of practical relations rather than an isolated mind inspecting an internal deficit. This feature is compatible with the relational orientation developed here.

There remains, however, an important difference of emphasis. Deweyan inquiry is oriented toward the transformation of an indeterminate situation into a determinate one. The present paper concentrates more narrowly on the trajectory through which epistemic differentiation becomes possible and on what may be lost when that trajectory is represented primarily through its eventual symbolic result.

The present inquiry therefore extends the temporal question in both directions. It examines conditions preceding explicit problem formation and asks what aspects of those conditions remain epistemically relevant after the problem or proposition has been stabilized.

3.4 Phenomenology and Pre-Reflective Organization

Phenomenology provides a different set of resources for examining the relation between explicit articulation and prior organization. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* emphasizes embodied and situated perception, habit, figure-ground organization, and a field of meaningful engagement that cannot be adequately reconstructed as a sequence of independently identified sensory elements [10].

The relevance of this account lies in the possibility that perceptual and practical significance precedes reflective judgment. A subject can become oriented toward a phenomenon, register a difference, or reorganize attention before possessing an explicit proposition describing what has occurred.

Pre-reflective organization should not be equated with a pure domain outside symbolic mediation. Bodily habits, perceptual expectations, linguistic practices, and cultural histories can participate in the organization of what becomes perceptually salient. Phenomenology therefore offers a way of distinguishing explicit reflection from prior organization without requiring that the latter be historically or linguistically unconditioned.

This distinction is particularly important for the present use of *pre-symbolic*. The relevant epistemic state can precede a new symbolic formulation while remaining shaped by earlier symbolic histories. A subject can perceive that an existing category no longer fits before possessing the conceptual resources needed to replace it.

Phenomenology also contributes to the analysis of epistemic trajectory by locating knowing within a field of involvement. The meaning of an encounter depends upon bodily orientation, prior familiarity, practical context, and the background against which a phenomenon becomes figure. The final proposition can abstract from much of this field while retaining a conceptual result generated within it.

The present paper adopts this structural insight without claiming that every dimension of pre-articulated apprehension is perceptual or embodied in the same way. Mathematical, conceptual, legal, and theoret-

ical inquiry can involve forms of pre-articulated tension whose phenomenological structures require different analysis.

3.5 Tacit Knowing and Inarticulate Epistemic Organization

Polanyi provides one of the most direct challenges to the assumption that epistemic organization is exhausted by what can be explicitly stated. His account of tacit knowing begins from the observation that human knowing can exceed what a subject is presently able to articulate [13]. Tacit integration plays an important role in skill, recognition, scientific judgment, and discovery.

Polanyi's distinction between subsidiary and focal awareness is especially relevant to the present inquiry. A subject can rely upon multiple clues, skills, and discriminations without attending focally to each of them as an explicit proposition. These subsidiary elements participate in what the subject knows while remaining differently organized from the focal object of attention.

This structure supports the distinction between symbolic output and the epistemic organization from which that output emerges. An articulated result can depend upon tacit discriminations that are not reproduced in the resulting sentence. The proposition can therefore preserve a focal conclusion while leaving parts of the operative epistemic organization unstated.

Polanyi's work on scientific discovery also emphasizes the recognition of a problem before its full solution or explicit specification. His broader epistemology places importance on judgment, skill, tradition, and personal participation in knowing rather than reducing scientific knowledge to formally explicit rules [14].

The present paper nevertheless distinguishes tacit knowing from pre-articulated apprehension. Tacit knowledge can remain tacit even within a well-developed practice, whereas pre-articulated apprehension refers specifically to an epistemic condition involved in the emergence of a new or still unstable articulation. The categories overlap in some cases but should not be treated as equivalent.

The distinction also prevents the paper from assuming that everything omitted from a proposition was once consciously experienced and subsequently lost. Some operative components of knowing may never have occupied explicit focal awareness in the first place.

3.6 Experiencing and the Formation of Meaning

Gendlin's *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* provides a particularly important resource for analyzing the movement between preconceptual experiencing and symbolic formulation [5]. His account concerns the way experienced meaning can function in the transition from one formulation to another rather than treating thought as the application of already complete conceptual patterns.

The significance of this approach for the present paper lies in its account of articulation as productive. What is experienced prior to formulation is not simply a completed proposition awaiting translation into words. A new formulation can differentiate the experience, alter what becomes available for further thought, and generate subsequent formulations.

This process is compatible with the distinction between the not-yet-symbolized and the symbolically irreducible developed in Section 2. A content can lack an adequate current formulation without being permanently inaccessible to symbolic expression. The transition toward articulation can involve repeated movement between partial formulation and further differentiation.

Gendlin's later process-oriented work develops this relation between bodily experience, language, situations, and novel formulation more extensively. His account of thinking beyond established patterns is particularly relevant where an existing conceptual structure proves inadequate and a new distinction must emerge through interaction with what has not yet been adequately formulated [6].

This approach offers a useful model for theoretical and philosophical inquiry. A thinker can know that an existing distinction is unsatisfactory before being able to produce a better one. Attempts at articulation can then change the experienced structure of the problem. The eventual proposition becomes the result of an iterative process rather than the transcription of a content that was complete from the beginning.

Gendlin therefore provides one of the clearest philosophical resources for the paper's concept of symbolic formation. The movement from apprehension to proposition is epistemically productive and can itself constitute part of knowing.

3.7 Process Philosophy and the Priority of Becoming

Process philosophy provides a broader metaphysical context for treating events, relations, and becoming as philosophically significant rather than treating stable entities as the exclusive starting point of analysis. Whitehead's *Process and Reality* develops an extensive metaphysics in which actuality is understood through processes of becoming and relational constitution [16].

The present paper does not adopt Whitehead's metaphysical system as its epistemology. Concepts such as actual occasions, prehension, and concrescence belong to a highly specific speculative framework and should not be translated directly into psychological or epistemological variables.

The relevance of process philosophy is more limited. It demonstrates that a philosophical explanation need not treat the stable form of a phenomenon as more fundamental than the process through which that form emerges. Applied methodologically to knowing, this orientation directs attention toward the becoming of an epistemic result rather than beginning exclusively from the result once stabilized.

This shift is important because propositions possess characteristics that make them unusually easy to preserve and analyze. They can be copied, compared, formalized, transmitted, and evaluated independently of many circumstances of their production. Epistemic trajectories are less tractable. They contain temporal development, contingent encounters, failed formulations, changing relations, and forms of apprehension that can be difficult to preserve.

The analytical convenience of the proposition can therefore produce an epistemological asymmetry. What is easiest to represent can come to stand for the entirety of knowing. A process-oriented approach makes that asymmetry available for examination without requiring the conclusion that propositions are epistemically secondary or unimportant.

3.8 Tacit Knowledge and the Problem of Explication

Later work on tacit knowledge further clarifies the difficulties involved in moving between operative knowledge and explicit representation. Collins distinguishes several forms of tacit knowledge and emphasizes that the category itself contains importantly different phenomena [3].

This distinction is useful because the inability to articulate knowledge can have different sources. Some knowledge may remain tacit because of contingent limitations in communication or available techniques. Some can depend upon embodied capacities. Other forms can depend upon collective practices and social organization that cannot be transferred through isolated strings of information alone.

The implication for the present paper is methodological. Failure of complete symbolic preservation should not be attributed to a single universal pre-symbolic domain. Different forms of epistemic remainder can arise for different reasons.

Collins also reinforces a distinction important to generative provenance. Successful transmission of an explicit statement does not guarantee transmission of all capacities required to use that statement competently within a practice. Epistemic content can therefore travel more easily than some of the conditions through which it becomes operationally meaningful.

This observation strengthens the need to distinguish semantic preservation from trajectory preservation while avoiding a generalized claim that all tacit elements are permanently inexpressible.

3.9 Comparative Boundaries

The traditions reviewed above converge only at a high level of abstraction. They each provide resources for resisting an account in which an explicit proposition exhausts the epistemic process through which it emerged. The grounds for that resistance, however, remain different.

Dependent origination provides a model of conditioned emergence without a self-sufficient source. Yogācāra offers a vocabulary of dispositions, manifestation, and recursive conditioning. Pragmatism analyzes the generation of determinate problems from indeterminate situations. Phenomenology describes pre-reflective and situated organization. Polanyi identifies tacit dimensions of knowing that exceed focal articulation. Gendlin examines the process through which experiencing and symbolic formulation transform one another. Process philosophy supplies a broader orientation toward becoming, while later analyses of tacit knowledge differentiate several reasons why explicit representation can fail to exhaust operative knowledge.

These similarities do not establish doctrinal identity. Buddhist dependent origination is not pragmatist inquiry. Yogācāra seeds are not tacit cognitive variables. Merleau-Pontian pre-reflective experience is not equivalent to Gendlin's experiencing. Polanyian tacit knowing is not simply unsymbolized propositional content. Whitehead's process metaphysics cannot be assumed to provide an empirical model of cognition.

The present paper therefore adopts a principle of comparative restraint. A concept is imported only for the explanatory work that its original framework can plausibly support. Structural resemblance is treated as a basis for comparison rather than evidence of theoretical equivalence.

3.10 Position of the Present Inquiry

The literature reveals a recurring gap between the event of knowing and its stabilized symbolic result. Existing traditions illuminate components of that gap, but they typically approach it from different directions.

Buddhist theories emphasize conditioning and continuity. Pragmatism emphasizes the formation and resolution of problems. Phenomenology emphasizes situated disclosure. Polanyi emphasizes tacit participation in knowing. Gendlin focuses directly upon the transition between experiencing and articulation. Process philosophy provides a general metaphysical orientation toward becoming.

The present inquiry draws these resources into a narrower epistemological problem: how should the trajectory from conditioned epistemic organization through contingent encounter, pre-articulated differentiation, and symbolic formation be understood when the final proposition does not preserve the whole trajectory through which it emerged?

The concept of *epistemic trajectory* supplies the temporal unit of analysis. *Pre-articulated apprehension* identifies epistemic change prior to stable formulation. *Dependent emergence* identifies the plurality of conditions involved in the genesis of knowing. *Contingency* captures the role of encounters whose occurrence and effects are not exhausted by prior structure. *Symbolic formation* describes the productive transition toward explicit expression. *Generative provenance* identifies aspects of the history through which the resulting expression acquired its epistemic significance.

The contribution does not consist in subsuming the traditions reviewed above under a common ontology. It consists in organizing distinctions that become important once the final proposition is treated as one phase of an epistemic trajectory rather than as an adequate representation of that trajectory in its entirety.

The next section develops this account directly. It examines how prior epistemic organization, concrete encounter, contingency, and relational conditions contribute to the emergence of pre-articulated differentiation before stable symbolic formulation becomes available.

4 Generative Relational Dynamics of Epistemic Genesis

This section develops the paper's positive account of epistemic genesis. Its objective is to explain how an epistemic result can emerge from a temporally extended and relationally conditioned trajectory whose relevant organization is only partially preserved in the final symbolic expression. The analysis focuses on five elements: prior epistemic organization, concrete encounter, contingent differentiation, symbolic

formation, and recursive transformation. These elements are analytically distinguishable, although they can overlap, recur, or develop in different orders.

The account is generative because epistemic development alters the conditions through which later knowing becomes possible. It is relational because the emergence of an epistemic result depends upon configurations involving subjects, phenomena, symbolic resources, practices, environments, histories, and other subjects. The framework does not require every component of an epistemic event to be reducible to one causal mechanism or ontological category.

4.1 Prior Epistemic Organization

Epistemic genesis does not begin from an unstructured subject confronting an unstructured world. A subject enters an encounter through an organization formed by previous perception, language, concepts, memory, affect, practice, education, social relations, and earlier episodes of inquiry. These conditions shape what can become noticeable, intelligible, surprising, or difficult to assimilate.

The term *prior epistemic organization* refers to this historically accumulated configuration. It includes explicit knowledge and concepts, while also including tacit discriminations, perceptual habits, embodied capacities, expectations, and practical familiarity. The organization is therefore broader than the set of propositions a subject could state at a particular moment.

This prior organization contributes to epistemic possibility in at least three ways. First, it makes distinctions available. A phenomenon can appear different only against some background through which difference can be registered. Second, it establishes expectations through which events can appear ordinary, anomalous, coherent, or problematic. Third, it supplies symbolic and practical resources through which an emerging difference can later be investigated.

Prior organization should not be understood as a completed representation of future knowledge. It structures a field of possible development without specifying which epistemic event will occur. The subject can possess the resources required to formulate a distinction without ever encountering the conditions that make the distinction salient.

The historical character of epistemic organization also means that capacities for knowing are unevenly distributed across time and context. A concept, instrument, archival resource, practice, or linguistic distinction can make possible forms of inquiry that were previously inaccessible. The emergence of knowing therefore depends partly upon the history through which the subject and the surrounding epistemic environment have been formed.

4.2 Encounter as a Generative Condition

Prior organization alone does not explain the occurrence of a particular epistemic development. An encounter introduces a concrete relation through which existing organization can be confirmed, extended, disturbed, or reconfigured.

An encounter can involve a material object, an observation, another person, a text, an argument, a symbolic system, a practical failure, a remembered event, or a relation among previously separated domains. The category is intentionally broad because the generative role of encounter does not depend upon one mode of sensory or conceptual access.

Many encounters produce no significant epistemic transformation. They can be absorbed through existing categories and remain unremarkable. Others generate a difference that resists immediate assimilation. The relevant feature is not novelty in isolation. A familiar phenomenon can become epistemically productive under a changed relation, while an objectively novel phenomenon can remain epistemically inert.

An encounter becomes generative when it alters the organization through which the subject relates to what is occurring. This alteration can remain initially minimal. Attention can shift. A familiar interpretation can lose stability. An association can appear between previously separate concepts. An unexpected contrast can become difficult to ignore. The subject may not yet possess a determinate question or proposition concerning what has changed.

The significance of encounter therefore lies in the relation it activates between prior organization and the phenomenon encountered. The same event can have substantially different epistemic consequences for subjects whose histories, practices, and conceptual resources differ.

4.3 Contingency and Epistemic Activation

The role of contingency becomes visible at the point where a possible epistemic development becomes locally active. A subject can possess relevant background knowledge for years without generating a particular insight. A single unplanned comparison, conversation, observation, or change of context can reorganize those resources and make a previously unavailable relation epistemically salient.

Contingency is used here to describe this openness in the occurrence and configuration of epistemically consequential encounters. The term does not indicate randomness in an absolute sense. Every encounter occurs within conditions, and its epistemic effects depend upon the organization into which it enters.

A contingent event can therefore be both conditioned and non-deducible from the subject's prior epistemic state. Prior organization makes the event capable of having significance, while the event contributes something to the trajectory that was not fully specified by that organization.

This relation is especially clear in serendipitous inquiry. A subject can encounter information while pursuing an unrelated objective and recognize a relation that redirects the original inquiry. The resulting development depends upon the accidental structure of the encounter and upon a prior organization capable of recognizing its relevance.

Contingency can also arise through social relation. Another person can introduce a distinction, objection, question, or example that changes the subject's epistemic trajectory. The significance of the contribution can exceed the intention of either participant. Conversation can therefore become generative without being reducible to the transfer of a completed epistemic object from one subject to another.

The account developed here treats contingency as one component of epistemic genesis rather than as an alternative to historical conditioning. Historical organization constrains what can become significant, while contingent events affect which possibilities become manifest and how later development proceeds.

4.4 Pre-Articulated Differentiation

A generative encounter can produce epistemic differentiation before a stable symbolic formulation becomes available. This subsection specifies that transition more closely.

Pre-articulated differentiation refers to a change in the subject's epistemic organization through which a previously undifferentiated or stable configuration acquires an unresolved internal distinction. The subject can register that two elements do not fit, that an interpretation is insufficient, that a phenomenon deserves further attention, or that a relation exists whose structure remains unclear.

The differentiation can remain weakly formed. A subject may know only that a problem exists without knowing what the problem is. The experience can be affective, perceptual, practical, conceptual, or mixed. Surprise, attraction, unease, contradiction, hesitation, and persistent return to a phenomenon can all accompany the process.

Pre-articulated differentiation should not be treated as a hidden proposition waiting for verbal expression. The later formulation can change the structure of what was initially apprehended. A subject who initially experiences a vague conflict between two ideas can later discover that the relevant difference lies in an assumption not represented in either idea explicitly.

The epistemic significance of this phase lies in its openness. Several possible articulations can remain available, and the trajectory can still develop in different directions. The subject has moved beyond complete indifference while remaining prior to stable conceptual closure.

This interval is particularly important in forms of inquiry where the available categories themselves are under pressure. Immediate classification can resolve an epistemic disturbance by forcing it into an existing symbolic structure. Sustained differentiation can instead expose the inadequacy of that structure and make a new distinction possible.

4.5 Relational Differentiation

Pre-articulated differentiation is relational because what becomes distinct is determined partly through the configuration in which the phenomenon is encountered. A difference is never epistemically meaningful in abstraction from all backgrounds of comparison, expectation, practice, and concern.

A phenomenon can acquire new significance when placed in relation to another phenomenon. A concept can become unstable when applied outside the domain in which it was developed. A familiar practice can become questionable when viewed through another historical or normative framework. Cross-domain comparison can therefore generate epistemic differences that are unavailable within either domain considered separately.

Relations with other subjects can play the same role. Disagreement can make an implicit assumption visible. Translation can expose distinctions that one language or conceptual system had previously left unmarked. Teaching can introduce a relation among concepts that reorganizes an emerging problem. Criticism can produce a differentiation that neither the original argument nor the critic's initial position contained in complete form.

The epistemic event is therefore co-generated. This does not imply that every participant contributes equally or that authorship and responsibility become irrelevant. It indicates that the emergence of a distinction can depend upon a configuration whose generative conditions exceed the isolated activity of the subject who eventually articulates the result.

4.6 Symbolic Formation and Conceptual Stabilization

Symbolic formation begins when an emerging epistemic difference becomes sufficiently determinate to enter an explicit representational form. This can occur through language, notation, diagram, formal model, classification, narrative, or another symbolic medium.

The process is epistemically productive. Formulation selects dimensions of the pre-articulated state, establishes relations among them, and makes some differences stable enough for further manipulation and criticism. An emerging insight can change substantially while being formulated because the symbolic resources used in articulation introduce distinctions that were not previously available in the same form.

Conceptual stabilization should therefore be understood as a transformation. The resulting proposition does not simply preserve an unchanged object that existed before articulation. It establishes a more determinate epistemic configuration from which inference, comparison, transmission, and revision become possible.

The choice of symbolic form can itself affect the resulting knowledge. Narrative, mathematical notation, diagrammatic representation, ordinary language, and formal logic support different operations and preserve different relations. A phenomenon that remains difficult to articulate verbally can become tractable through a diagram, while a formal representation can suppress contextual relations that remain visible in narrative form.

Symbolic formation therefore introduces both epistemic gain and selective loss. It increases determinacy and transmissibility while reducing the multiplicity of the preceding trajectory to a more stable form.

4.7 Iteration and Re-Articulation

Symbolic stabilization rarely implies final closure. A first articulation can remain provisional and become the object of subsequent inquiry.

An emerging concept can reveal that two previously combined phenomena require separation. A proposition can generate a counterexample. A definition can prove too broad or too narrow. A formal model can expose assumptions that were difficult to identify before formalization. Articulation therefore creates new conditions for differentiation.

Epistemic development can consequently proceed through cycles of stabilization and renewed instability. A symbolic form temporarily organizes the phenomenon, the organized phenomenon generates

further encounters or contradictions, and the resulting disturbance motivates re-articulation.

This recursive process is especially visible in theoretical inquiry. Concepts often develop through repeated revision rather than through one transition from ignorance to completed definition. The historical identity of the concept depends partly upon this sequence of transformations.

The same pattern can occur at the level of individual understanding. A subject can first adopt an inherited concept, later encounter cases that destabilize it, and eventually reformulate the concept in a way that changes the subject's relation to both the original problem and the inherited tradition.

4.8 Epistemic Stabilization and the Emergence of the Proposition

A proposition emerges when an epistemic relation has acquired sufficient symbolic stability to be expressed in a form capable of standing independently within further reasoning, communication, or preservation.

The proposition represents an important threshold. It can be cited, criticized, translated, transmitted, compared with alternatives, incorporated into formal systems, and preserved beyond the immediate event of its production. These capacities account for the central role of propositions in epistemic institutions.

The threshold can nevertheless obscure the temporal depth of what precedes it. Once stabilized, a proposition can appear self-contained. Its grammatical form does not disclose the failed distinctions, affective disturbances, contingent encounters, social relations, or historical conditions through which it emerged.

This asymmetry between generative complexity and symbolic compactness is central to the argument of the paper. The epistemic result can be substantially shorter and more portable than its history of formation.

The point does not diminish the epistemic importance of propositions. Their stability enables cumulative inquiry precisely because later subjects do not need to reconstruct every original trajectory. The issue concerns what becomes invisible when the portability of the proposition is treated as evidence that the proposition exhausts the epistemic event.

4.9 Recursive Incorporation

Once stabilized, an epistemic result can be incorporated into the organization from which future inquiry develops. The result thereby changes its functional position. What was previously the endpoint of one trajectory becomes a condition within another.

A newly acquired distinction can change what the subject notices in subsequent encounters. A proposition can become an expectation against which later events appear anomalous. A method can reorganize the kinds of evidence considered relevant. A new symbolic vocabulary can render previously inaccessible questions formulable.

Epistemic genesis is therefore recursive. Knowing generates conditions for further knowing.

The recursion also operates socially and historically. A concept developed by one subject can be preserved in a text and become part of the prior epistemic organization of another subject who encounters it generations later. The second trajectory does not reproduce the first. The inherited result enters a new configuration and can generate developments that were absent from the original context.

This recursive circulation explains how epistemic traditions can develop without preserving complete generative histories. Symbolic stabilization allows results to travel, while new contexts continually reorganize their significance.

4.10 Dependent Origination as a Comparative Structure

The account developed above provides a more precise basis for comparison with dependent origination. The comparison concerns conditioned emergence, relational dependence, and the absence of a self-sufficient origin.

An epistemic result arises through conditions that include prior organization, encounter, symbolic resources, practices, other subjects, material settings, and contingent events. No single component is sufficient in isolation. Different configurations can produce different trajectories, and the same component can have different effects under different conditions.

This structure resembles the general philosophical orientation of dependent origination insofar as emergence is understood through conditions rather than through independent self-existence [7]. The comparison is conceptually useful because it allows the epistemic event to be analyzed without locating an absolute origin in either the subject or the object.

The comparison remains limited. Buddhist dependent origination concerns a broader doctrinal field than the epistemic process described here. The present framework does not claim that an epistemic trajectory instantiates *pratītyasamutpāda* in a technically Buddhist sense. It uses conditioned emergence as a comparative structure for clarifying the absence of a self-sufficient epistemic source.

The distinction is important methodologically. Comparative philosophy can generate new analytical possibilities while preserving differences among the traditions being compared.

4.11 Seed–Manifestation Relations as a Comparative Model

Yogācāra seed–manifestation structures provide a second comparative resource for the relation between prior organization and explicit epistemic emergence [9].

The relevance lies in the possibility that operative conditions need not remain continuously manifest in explicit consciousness. Previous encounters, dispositions, habits, and symbolic formations can shape later epistemic events without being simultaneously represented when the event occurs.

The comparison also illuminates recursion. A manifest epistemic event can alter future organization, just as Yogācāra accounts describe present activity as contributing to later dispositions. The structural similarity lies in the movement between latent conditioning and manifest event.

The present paper does not identify epistemic organization with *ālayavijñāna*, epistemic dispositions with *bīja*, or conceptual development with karmic maturation. Such identifications would erase important differences in doctrinal function and explanatory purpose.

The comparative value is narrower. Manifestation can be temporally later than some of its operative conditions, and manifestation can recursively modify the conditions for subsequent manifestation. This structure provides a useful historical philosophical analogue for the trajectory developed here.

4.12 Generative Provenance Across the Trajectory

The account of epistemic genesis developed in this section also clarifies the concept of generative provenance.

Generative provenance does not consist of every event causally preceding a proposition. Its relevant content concerns the relations through which the epistemic form and significance of the result were generated.

The provenance of a concept can include the problem that made the concept necessary, the contrast through which its distinction became visible, the failed formulations that shaped its boundary, the interlocutors who altered the inquiry, and the symbolic transformations through which the final form became stable.

Different components of provenance can matter for different purposes. A reader interested only in using a verified calculation may need little of the trajectory through which the method was discovered. A philosopher interpreting a conceptual distinction can require substantially more information concerning the problem-space from which it emerged. A practitioner can require relational or experiential context that remains absent from a concise written rule.

Generative provenance is therefore selective and purpose-relative. The framework does not posit a complete archival ideal in which every element of an epistemic trajectory must be preserved.

Its analytical role is to make visible the difference between what a symbolic result states and what was required for that result to acquire its epistemic position.

4.13 Trajectory Transformation and Subject Formation

An epistemic trajectory can transform more than the representation of an object. It can alter the epistemic capacities of the subject participating in the process.

Repeated attempts at articulation can develop finer conceptual discrimination. Failed interpretations can increase sensitivity to evidence. Encounter with another framework can change the range of available comparisons. Practical experience can modify the kinds of differences that become perceptually or conceptually salient.

The subject who reaches the final proposition can therefore differ epistemically from the subject who began the trajectory. The proposition records an outcome of a process that has also modified the conditions of later knowing.

This transformation explains why identical propositions can occupy different epistemic positions across subjects. One subject can reproduce a statement without possessing the discriminations generated through the trajectory that originally produced it. Another can understand its inferential structure while lacking its practical dimensions. A third can integrate the proposition into a broader history of experience and use it to generate further inquiry.

The distinction should remain descriptive. It does not establish a hierarchy among these epistemic positions. Different contexts require different forms of knowledge and different depths of trajectory.

4.14 Scope of the Generative Account

The account developed in this section should be read as a framework for epistemic genesis rather than as a universal causal sequence.

It does not claim that every act of knowing begins with a pre-articulated disturbance. Many inquiries begin from explicit questions inherited through education, institutions, disciplinary traditions, or other subjects. It does not claim that every epistemic result requires prolonged contingency or personal transformation. Direct testimony and formal derivation can generate genuine epistemic results through comparatively compressed trajectories.

The framework instead identifies a class of epistemic processes in which the formation of knowing extends beyond the final proposition and in which prior organization, contingent encounter, pre-articulated differentiation, and symbolic formation contribute materially to the result.

The framework also leaves open the metaphysical status of pre-symbolic experience, the normative value of preserving epistemic trajectories, and the degree of provenance required for different epistemic practices.

Its principal contribution is structural. An epistemic result can emerge from a dependently conditioned trajectory whose relevant relations are not exhausted by the symbolic form through which the result is eventually expressed.

The next section examines the transition from pre-articulated differentiation to symbolic stabilization in greater detail. Particular attention is given to the epistemic work performed by formulation, the selective character of symbolic preservation, and the possibility that the final proposition functions as a trace of a generative trajectory rather than as its complete representation.

5 Symbolic Stabilization and the Epistemic Trace

The preceding section described epistemic genesis as a trajectory involving prior organization, encounter, contingency, pre-articulated differentiation, and symbolic formation. This section examines the final transition more closely. Its objective is to clarify what occurs when an epistemic process becomes sufficiently determinate to be expressed as a proposition, definition, distinction, model, or other relatively stable symbolic form.

The central claim is that symbolic stabilization performs two epistemic operations simultaneously. It preserves. It also selects. A proposition makes an epistemic result portable, criticizable, transmissible, and available for further inference. At the same time, it ordinarily preserves only part of the trajectory

through which the result became possible. The relation between epistemic genesis and symbolic expression is therefore neither one of complete identity nor one of simple loss. Stabilization creates a new epistemic object whose usefulness depends partly upon its relative independence from the generative process that produced it.

The concept of an *epistemic trace* is introduced to describe this relation. A symbolic result can retain consequences of an epistemic trajectory without constituting a complete representation of that trajectory. What remains in the proposition can be sufficient for some epistemic purposes while remaining insufficient for others.

5.1 Articulation as Epistemic Work

Articulation should not be treated as a final linguistic operation performed after knowing has already been completed. In many forms of inquiry, the work of formulation contributes directly to the determination of what is known.

A subject can begin with an unresolved difference whose relevant dimensions remain unstable. Attempts to describe the difference require selection among possible distinctions. A provisional term can make one relation visible while concealing another. A failed definition can reveal that two cases previously treated together must be separated. A question can expose an assumption that was not explicit in the initial apprehension.

Symbolic articulation therefore participates in epistemic differentiation. The subject does not merely search for words corresponding to a completed internal content. The production and revision of symbolic forms can alter the structure of the emerging content itself.

Gendlin's analysis of the relation between experiencing and formulation is particularly relevant to this point. Symbolic formulation can interact with what has not yet been adequately articulated and produce further differentiation rather than merely represent a fixed prior content [5, 6].

The process can be iterative. A first articulation produces a temporarily stable distinction. That distinction makes further comparison possible. New cases then expose limits in the formulation, and the subject returns to the problem with a modified conceptual organization. Epistemic stabilization can therefore emerge through repeated movement between formulation and renewed differentiation.

5.2 Determinacy and Symbolic Stabilization

A symbolic form becomes epistemically stable when it possesses sufficient determinacy to support operations beyond the immediate experience in which it emerged. A proposition can be evaluated for consistency, compared with other propositions, incorporated into an argument, transmitted to another subject, or preserved across time.

Stabilization should not be identified with finality. A proposition can be stable enough for use while remaining revisable. Scientific concepts, philosophical distinctions, legal categories, and theoretical models routinely function productively before their later limitations become visible.

The relevant threshold is therefore practical and epistemic rather than absolute. A symbolic form has stabilized when the inquiry can temporarily treat it as an object of further reasoning rather than as an unresolved attempt at formulation.

This transition generates an important asymmetry. Before stabilization, the subject may depend upon a complex field of memories, examples, comparisons, affective responses, practical contexts, and failed formulations to maintain the emerging distinction. After stabilization, a compact symbol can preserve enough of the distinction for many of those supports to become unnecessary in immediate use.

Symbolic stabilization thereby increases epistemic portability. The result can travel beyond the local conditions of its emergence.

5.3 Selection Within Symbolic Formation

The gain in determinacy is accompanied by selection. Every stable symbolic form foregrounds some relations and leaves others implicit, peripheral, or absent.

A proposition selects a determinate assertion from a broader trajectory. A definition establishes boundaries while suppressing many of the cases, contrasts, and failed distinctions through which those boundaries were developed. A mathematical representation retains formally relevant relations while abstracting from features that fall outside the model. A conceptual taxonomy preserves classificatory structure while omitting much of the history through which the categories became necessary.

Selection is not an accidental defect of symbolization. It is one of the conditions of symbolic usefulness. A representation that attempted to preserve every feature of its generative history would lose much of the compression that makes symbolic reasoning, transmission, and cumulative inquiry possible.

The relevant issue is therefore selective adequacy. A symbolic form preserves enough of an epistemic relation for a particular purpose while omitting other dimensions.

Different symbolic media produce different selections. A narrative can preserve temporal and relational context that a proposition omits. A diagram can retain spatial or structural relations more clearly than ordinary prose. Mathematical notation can preserve formal dependencies with great precision while removing features of lived or historical context. Dialogue can preserve disagreement, sequence, and revision that disappear in a final doctrinal statement.

Symbolic stabilization should therefore be understood relative to the representational capacities and purposes of the medium through which it occurs.

5.4 Epistemic Compression

The relation between trajectory and stabilized result can be described as *epistemic compression*. A temporally extended process is represented through a comparatively compact symbolic object.

The term requires qualification. Ordinary compression can suggest a reversible encoding from which the original data can later be reconstructed. Epistemic compression is frequently non-reversible. The proposition does not contain sufficient information to reconstruct the complete trajectory through which it was generated.

A statement can remain after the uncertainty that preceded it has disappeared from the record. The comparisons that produced a conceptual distinction can be lost. The failed formulations that determined the final boundary can become invisible. The accidental encounter that redirected the inquiry can leave no trace in the resulting proposition.

The resulting expression is therefore better understood as a stabilized epistemic remainder than as an encoding of the whole generative process.

This asymmetry is compatible with successful knowledge transmission. Later subjects can acquire and use the result without reproducing the original trajectory. Indeed, cumulative knowledge depends upon this possibility. Every generation need not rediscover every proposition through the conditions of its first emergence.

The epistemological problem begins when the compressed result is treated as exhaustive evidence concerning the process of knowing from which it emerged.

5.5 The Proposition as an Epistemic Trace

The concept of an epistemic trace captures the relation between symbolic preservation and generative history more precisely.

A trace is produced by a process and bears some relation to that process, yet it is not identical with the process itself. A proposition can similarly carry the result of epistemic differentiation while omitting many of the relations through which the differentiation occurred.

The trace can be highly informative. A well-formed proposition can preserve the essential distinction required for inference or communication. Its semantic content can be evaluated independently of the

biography of the person who first articulated it. The proposition can therefore possess epistemic functions that do not depend upon access to its generative provenance.

At the same time, the trace can underdetermine the epistemic trajectory. The same expression can emerge from testimony, deduction, practical experience, conceptual experimentation, imitation, accidental discovery, or computational generation.

Symbolic identity therefore does not reveal the history of knowing.

This point should be separated from skepticism concerning propositional content. The proposition can be true, justified, useful, and epistemically important while remaining an incomplete representation of its own genesis. The claim concerns the relation between result and trajectory rather than the validity of the result.

5.6 Semantic Content and Generative Meaning

A further distinction concerns the relation between the semantic content of an expression and the meaning it acquires within a particular epistemic trajectory.

Two subjects can competently understand the literal or inferential content of the same proposition while relating it to different histories of experience, practice, inquiry, and transformation. The proposition is semantically shared, while its location within each subject's epistemic organization differs.

The difference can affect what follows from the proposition for the subject. One subject can reproduce a distinction correctly without recognizing the conditions under which it becomes relevant. Another can use the same distinction to identify new cases, revise related concepts, or generate further questions because the distinction is integrated into a broader epistemic trajectory.

The present paper uses *generative meaning* provisionally for this trajectory-dependent dimension. The term does not imply that semantic content is purely subjective or that propositions possess no meaning independently of individual histories. It identifies the additional epistemic role a symbolic form can acquire through its integration into a generative organization.

Generative meaning can therefore vary even where linguistic form remains constant.

This distinction becomes important when epistemic expressions are detached from the contexts in which they were generated. Transmission can preserve semantic content while altering the relations through which that content becomes operationally significant.

5.7 Brevity and Epistemic Depth

The distinction between symbolic result and trajectory also prevents the complexity of an expression from being used as a direct measure of epistemic depth.

A long epistemic trajectory can terminate in an extremely concise proposition. Years of observation, practice, conceptual revision, and failed explanation can produce a distinction expressible in a single sentence. Conversely, a symbolically elaborate expression can be produced through recombination of existing formulations without a comparably extended process of epistemic transformation.

Neither brevity nor complexity therefore provides sufficient evidence concerning generative provenance.

This observation is particularly relevant to philosophical, practical, and religious traditions in which highly compressed formulations can function as the endpoints of much longer trajectories of inquiry or practice. A concise expression can acquire significance through the history surrounding its production and use.

The converse qualification is equally important. A short statement should not be attributed epistemic depth merely because it is associated with a long tradition or experienced practitioner. The relevant trajectory must itself be examined rather than inferred from stylistic simplicity.

The framework therefore rejects both symbolic maximalism and symbolic minimalism as indicators of epistemic depth. The relation between expression and generative history must be investigated independently.

5.8 Partial Articulation and Residual Indeterminacy

Symbolic stabilization need not eliminate every dimension of the pre-articulated state. A proposition can resolve one aspect of a problem while leaving other dimensions only partially differentiated.

This residual indeterminacy can become the basis of later inquiry. A concept that initially appears adequate can generate discomfort when applied to new cases. A theoretical model can solve one problem while producing anomalies at its boundary. A philosophical distinction can clarify one ambiguity while making another visible.

Symbolic formation therefore does not simply close the epistemic trajectory. It can redistribute indeterminacy.

Some dimensions become stable enough for transmission and inference. Others remain tacit, peripheral, unresolved, or newly generated through the act of stabilization itself.

Polanyi's analysis of tacit knowing provides one resource for understanding why explicit articulation need not exhaust the epistemic organization operative in a judgment or practice [13]. Collins further shows that different forms of tacit knowledge can remain unarticulated for importantly different reasons [3].

The existence of residual indeterminacy therefore does not support one general theory of ineffability. What remains outside explicit formulation can reflect temporary conceptual limitations, embodied skill, collective practice, contextual dependence, or other conditions.

5.9 Re-Articulation and the Revisability of the Trace

The epistemic trace remains open to reinterpretation and re-articulation.

A later subject can encounter an inherited proposition and discover that the distinction it preserves is inadequate for a new context. Historical research can recover elements of the original problem that were lost in subsequent transmission. Translation can reveal ambiguities concealed by one linguistic form. New conceptual resources can make previously implicit dimensions articulable.

The stabilized expression can therefore re-enter a generative trajectory.

This possibility complicates any strict separation between genesis and transmission. Transmission is itself generative. A proposition produced as the result of one trajectory becomes an encountered symbolic object within another. Its meaning, relevance, and conceptual boundaries can then be transformed.

The epistemic history of a proposition is therefore potentially open-ended. Original genesis, stabilization, transmission, interpretation, and re-articulation form successive relational configurations rather than a single movement from discovery to static preservation.

This recursive structure also explains why intellectual traditions can retain identity while changing substantially. A stabilized symbolic corpus provides continuity, while repeated reinterpretation generates new epistemic relations around that corpus.

5.10 Trajectory Loss and Epistemic Loss

The loss of generative trajectory should not be identified automatically with epistemic loss.

Many epistemic purposes require only the stabilized result. A calculation can be used correctly without knowledge of the circumstances in which the method was invented. A well-established empirical result can guide action without the user reproducing the sequence of observations that produced it. Symbolic compression is indispensable precisely because it allows epistemic labor to be distributed across subjects and generations.

Trajectory loss becomes epistemically significant only where features of the trajectory are relevant to the function expected of the result.

A conceptual distinction can become difficult to apply when the problem that motivated it is forgotten. A rule can become rigid when the conditions limiting its original application disappear from the record. A practical teaching can become misleading when detached from the relational circumstances through

which its meaning was established. A proposition can appear more universal than its generative history warrants.

The appropriate question is therefore contextual: which dimensions of provenance are necessary for the epistemic use presently intended?

This formulation avoids treating complete historical preservation as an ideal. No epistemic system could preserve every generative detail. It instead directs attention toward selective preservation of relations required for intelligibility, appropriate application, revision, or future generativity.

5.11 The Limit of Reconstruction

Even where generative provenance matters, complete reconstruction of an epistemic trajectory is rarely possible.

Human memory is selective. Participants interpret their own histories retrospectively. Texts preserve only portions of encounters. Institutional archives reflect selection and power. Many affective, perceptual, tacit, and material relations leave no stable symbolic record.

A reconstructed trajectory is therefore itself an epistemic product rather than transparent recovery of an original process.

This limitation has two consequences.

First, the concept of generative provenance should not be interpreted as a demand for exhaustive historical access. Provenance can remain partial while still contributing significantly to interpretation.

Second, absence of recorded provenance should not be treated as evidence that no relevant trajectory existed. The portability of a proposition makes it possible for the result to survive after much of its generative history has become inaccessible.

The analysis must therefore distinguish between the trajectory itself and the later representations available concerning that trajectory.

5.12 Symbolic Absence and Epistemic Significance

The relation between knowing and symbolic expression also raises the possibility that an epistemically significant trajectory terminates without a determinate propositional output.

A subject can conclude that an existing question was malformed. Inquiry can produce suspension of judgment. A conceptual distinction can remain only partially stabilized. A practical transformation can occur without being followed by an adequate verbal account.

Such cases do not establish that silence or absence of proposition constitutes knowledge. Symbolic absence is radically underdetermined. It can reflect confusion, ignorance, inability, refusal, irrelevance, strategic silence, or forms of epistemic transformation whose available expression remains inadequate.

The significance of symbolic absence therefore depends upon provenance and context even more strongly than the significance of explicit expression.

A silence situated after prolonged dialogue, practice, conceptual exhaustion, or deliberate suspension can occupy a different epistemic relation from an identical absence of speech produced by lack of engagement. The observable output can be the same while the trajectories differ.

This possibility will become important in the following sections, where dialogical and scriptural forms of epistemic preservation are examined as cases in which historical and relational context can contribute to the interpretation of highly compressed expressions or symbolic absence.

5.13 Boundary of the Epistemic Trace

The concept of the epistemic trace is intended to establish a limited structural claim.

A stabilized symbolic result can preserve an epistemically important outcome without preserving the complete trajectory through which that outcome emerged. The relation is selective, frequently irreversible, and dependent upon the symbolic medium through which stabilization occurs.

This claim does not imply that propositions are inferior to lived or pre-articulated experience. Symbolic stabilization creates capacities for criticism, transmission, abstraction, comparison, and cumulative inquiry that would otherwise be severely constrained.

It also does not imply that every omitted feature of an epistemic trajectory is epistemically relevant. Much of the history surrounding an inquiry can be irrelevant to the validity or intended use of its result.

The analytical task is therefore to identify conditions under which the difference between trace and trajectory matters.

The next section examines this problem through forms of epistemic preservation that retain more than isolated propositions. Dialogues, narrative settings, interlocutory sequences, repeated questions, disagreement, and other trajectory-bearing structures provide cases in which the history of knowing is preserved alongside, and sometimes more extensively than, its final symbolic result.

6 Dialogical and Scriptural Preservation of Epistemic Trajectories

The preceding section distinguished a stabilized epistemic result from the trajectory through which that result emerges. It also introduced the concept of an epistemic trace to describe the selective relation between symbolic expression and generative history. This section examines textual forms that preserve more of that history than an isolated proposition ordinarily does.

Dialogue, narrative framing, interlocutory sequence, repeated questioning, failed answers, correction, disagreement, and silence can all function as trajectory-bearing structures. They preserve relations among epistemic events rather than presenting only their final conceptual residue. Their significance does not lie in reproducing an original experience without mediation. A written dialogue or scripture is already a symbolic artifact shaped by genre, transmission, selection, redaction, translation, and interpretation. The more limited claim is that some textual forms retain dimensions of epistemic provenance that a decontextualized proposition suppresses.

Platonic dialogue and Buddhist sūtra literature provide particularly useful comparative cases. They arise from different intellectual, literary, and religious traditions and should not be treated as instances of one common method. Their comparison is restricted to the epistemic functions of textual form: both can preserve sequences of questioning, relations among interlocutors, moments of failure or aporia, and conditions surrounding the emergence of a teaching or distinction.

6.1 Trajectory-Bearing Textual Forms

A proposition-centered text ordinarily seeks to make a result available with minimal dependence upon the circumstances of its production. This decontextualization is epistemically powerful. It permits a claim to be evaluated, transported, translated, cited, and incorporated into new arguments without requiring reconstruction of the event in which it was first articulated.

Other textual forms preserve additional relations.

A dialogue can record who asks a question, what assumptions motivate the question, how an initial answer fails, what objection changes the direction of the inquiry, and how the interlocutors' positions develop. A narrative frame can identify place, circumstance, participants, and the event that occasions the teaching. Repetition can preserve the fact that an initial formulation was insufficient. Silence can be recorded as an event whose significance depends upon what preceded it.

These textual features are epistemically relevant when the relation among events contributes to the intelligibility of the resulting expression.

The distinction is therefore not between propositional and non-propositional texts. Dialogues and narratives contain propositions throughout. The relevant difference concerns the amount and kind of relational organization preserved around those propositions.

A trajectory-bearing text preserves at least some information concerning how one symbolic state develops into another.

6.2 Dialogue as a Record of Conceptual Transformation

Platonic dialogue provides a clear case in which philosophy is preserved through sequences of questioning rather than through authorial presentation of a completed doctrinal system. The dialogues vary substantially in structure, and no single account of the Platonic dialogue form should be imposed upon all of them. Questioning, refutation, extended speech, narrative framing, myth, and aporia occupy different positions across different works [12].

For the present inquiry, the relevant feature is that the dialogue can preserve conceptual transformation.

An interlocutor proposes an answer. The answer is examined through examples, counterexamples, distinctions, or further questions. An assumption that was initially implicit becomes explicit. A proposed definition proves inadequate. The discussion then proceeds from an epistemic organization that differs from the one with which it began.

The epistemic content of such a text cannot always be represented adequately by extracting the final proposition reached by the speakers. In some dialogues no stable final definition is reached at all. The development of the problem, exposure of inadequate assumptions, and generation of a more refined space of possible inquiry can constitute much of the philosophical work.

The *Theaetetus* is especially instructive in this respect. Its inquiry into knowledge proceeds through successive proposed accounts and their difficulties without terminating in a successful definition [12]. The absence of a final positive definition does not make the intervening inquiry epistemically empty. The sequence preserves distinctions and failures through which the problem of knowledge has become more differentiated.

A proposition-centered reconstruction can summarize the objections developed in the dialogue. It can therefore preserve important philosophical content. What it tends to remove is the order through which those objections become necessary within the inquiry.

6.3 Interlocutors as Generative Conditions

Dialogue also makes visible the role of other subjects in epistemic genesis.

A question is addressed to someone occupying a particular epistemic position. An answer becomes available because that interlocutor possesses particular beliefs, assumptions, skills, experiences, or confusions. The next question is then conditioned by the answer actually given rather than by an abstract sequence fixed independently of the exchange.

The resulting trajectory is relational in a strong but limited sense. Neither speaker needs to contain the complete later argument at the beginning of the conversation. A distinction can emerge through the interaction between positions.

This structure is particularly apparent in refutational dialogue. An interlocutor's commitment provides material for subsequent questioning. The discovery of inconsistency depends upon the relation among claims that become available through the exchange. The epistemic development is therefore generated partly through the interlocutory configuration.

The written dialogue transforms this event into a transmissible symbolic form. A later reader cannot reproduce the original relation simply by reading the text. The reader can nevertheless encounter a preserved sequence in which the reasons for conceptual revision remain more visible than they would in a list of conclusions.

The interlocutor is therefore more than literary decoration where the development of the argument depends upon the particular position from which a response occurs.

6.4 Narrative Framing and Generative Provenance

Narrative framing preserves another dimension of epistemic provenance: the circumstances in which an epistemic event is represented as occurring.

Buddhist sūtras frequently begin with framing formulae conventionally rendered through expressions such as “Thus have I heard” and an indication of the occasion on which the discourse occurred. The interpretation and punctuation of these formulae possess a complex textual history, and their linguistic form should not be treated casually. Nattier shows that even the relation between the familiar opening formula and the phrase corresponding to “at one time” has been interpreted in several different ways across modern scholarship [11].

For the present analysis, no particular solution to that textual problem is required. The relevant point is structural. Sūtra framing conventionally situates discourse within a represented event of transmission. Speaker, audience, place, circumstance, and occasion can be preserved alongside the teaching.

Such framing can be understood as a form of provenance-bearing symbolization. The teaching is presented as having occurred somewhere, before particular interlocutors, under particular conditions. The resulting text therefore does more than preserve a sequence of doctrinal propositions.

This does not mean that the frame supplies transparent historical metadata in the modern documentary sense. Buddhist scriptures possess complex histories of oral transmission, textual composition, redaction, translation, and canonization. The narrative scene is itself part of a literary and religious form.

Its epistemic significance for the present paper lies elsewhere. The textual form refuses to present the teaching as though its only relevant property were its abstract semantic content. It preserves a represented relational setting within which the content is made to occur.

6.5 Occasion and the Emergence of Teaching

The occasion of a teaching can contribute to what the teaching means and why a particular formulation becomes relevant.

A question can arise because a specific interlocutor encounters a difficulty. A teaching can respond to illness, disagreement, misunderstanding, doubt, practical conflict, or another event. The formulation that follows is thereby conditioned by a problem-space rather than appearing as an arbitrary selection from an abstract body of doctrine.

This relation is especially important for generative provenance. A proposition detached from the problem that generated it can remain semantically intelligible while losing information concerning its scope, purpose, or conditions of application.

Narrative preservation can retain some of those relations. The reader learns what was asked before an answer was given, which assumption the response addresses, and what subsequent exchange reveals about the adequacy of the initial formulation.

This structure resembles the pragmatist insight that the determination of a problem belongs to inquiry rather than simply preceding it [4]. The narrative record can preserve a sequence in which the problem itself changes as the exchange proceeds.

The relevance of occasion should nevertheless remain contextual. Some propositions are intentionally general and require little knowledge of their occasion for appropriate use. Others become misleading when extracted from the conditions that governed their original articulation. The significance of provenance must therefore be evaluated according to the epistemic function of the expression.

6.6 Repetition, Correction, and Recursive Differentiation

Repeated questioning can preserve a feature of epistemic genesis that a final summary tends to erase: understanding frequently develops through unsuccessful formulations.

An interlocutor asks a question and receives an answer. The answer reveals that the question contained an unstable assumption. A new question is formulated. A distinction is introduced. The resulting answer can again prove insufficient.

From the perspective of efficient information transfer, such repetition can appear redundant. From the perspective of epistemic trajectory, the repetitions are often different events. Each occurs after the epistemic organization of the participants has changed.

A sequence of similar questions can therefore preserve recursive differentiation. What initially appears to be one problem becomes several. A concept that seemed adequate at the beginning becomes impossible to retain in its original form.

This feature is also important for readers. The text can lead the reader through distinctions in an order approximating the structure of the recorded inquiry. A later summary can state all of those distinctions at once, but the epistemic effect of receiving them simultaneously can differ from encountering the reasons for their successive emergence.

No general pedagogical superiority follows from this difference. A concise summary can be more appropriate for many purposes. The point is that sequential preservation retains a dimension of generative provenance that summary compresses.

6.7 Aporia and the Preservation of Unresolved Inquiry

Trajectory-bearing forms can also preserve inquiry without converting it into a final positive proposition.

Aporia is particularly important in this respect. An inquiry can terminate with the failure of available formulations rather than with a stable answer. Such a termination preserves an epistemic result of a different kind: previously available conceptual positions have become difficult or impossible to maintain, while a replacement has not yet been stabilized.

The epistemic event therefore contains differentiated ignorance.

The subject no longer occupies the position from which the original question was asked, even though no complete answer has emerged. This structure is closely related to pre-articulated apprehension. Inquiry can make an insufficiency increasingly determinate without immediately generating a successful proposition.

A proposition-centered account can represent aporia through a statement such as the claim that no adequate definition has been established. Such a statement is accurate at the level of outcome. It does not preserve the sequence through which the inadequacy of competing formulations became visible.

Aporia therefore illustrates the difference between preservation of conclusion and preservation of epistemic transformation.

6.8 Dialogical Structure in the Teaching of Vimalakīrti

The *Teaching of Vimalakīrti* provides a Buddhist example in which dialogical structure, narrative situation, differing interlocutory positions, and highly compressed symbolic events occur within the same text [1].

The text does not present nonduality only through an abstract definition. Different bodhisattvas articulate accounts of entry into nonduality, after which Mañjuśrī characterizes even those explanations through the problem of discursive duality. Vimalakīrti is then asked to offer his own explanation and responds with silence. Mañjuśrī interprets that silence affirmatively within the sequence of the exchange [1].

The epistemic structure of the episode is important for the present paper.

The silence is not preserved as an isolated blank. It occurs after a series of verbal formulations, after Mañjuśrī's intervention concerning the limits of those formulations, and in response to a direct request addressed to Vimalakīrti. It is then interpreted by another interlocutor.

The significance of the silence is therefore relationally generated within the textual trajectory.

Removing that trajectory would radically underdetermine the event. An isolated record that Vimalakīrti "said nothing" would not establish whether the silence expressed insight, ignorance, refusal, inability, indifference, or something else. The narrative and dialogical provenance supplies the conditions under which the text asks the reader to interpret the silence.

The episode consequently provides an unusually clear illustration of the difference between symbolic absence and absence of epistemic significance.

6.9 Silence as a Provenance-Dependent Event

Silence requires particular conceptual caution because it lacks determinate semantic content when considered independently of context.

The same observable absence of speech can occur through radically different trajectories. A subject can remain silent because no answer is known, because the question is rejected, because speaking would be socially inappropriate, because a conceptual distinction has failed, because silence functions performatively within a practice, or because no response is intended.

Silence therefore has an especially high dependence upon provenance.

The Vimalakīrti episode illustrates one possible configuration, but it should not be generalized into the proposition that silence is epistemically superior to language. Within the same episode, substantial verbal articulation precedes the silence and contributes to the conditions under which the silence can function as it does [1].

The epistemic structure is therefore not adequately represented by an opposition between speech and silence. Speech participates in generating the conditions under which the later absence of speech becomes interpretable.

This point is important for the broader theory of symbolic formation. Symbolically minimal or absent output can depend upon symbolically rich prior organization. The visible result can therefore approach zero while the generative provenance remains extensive.

The relationship also works in the opposite direction. A highly elaborate symbolic output need not imply an equally extensive trajectory of personal epistemic transformation.

Output magnitude and trajectory depth should consequently remain independent variables in epistemic analysis.

6.10 The Interpretive Dependence of Minimal Expressions

Minimal expressions reveal the importance of generative provenance because their semantic underdetermination places greater interpretive weight upon context.

A single word, brief response, gesture, or silence can acquire substantial meaning when embedded within an established relational history. The same form can remain almost meaningless when detached from that history.

This phenomenon should not be confused with mystical ineffability. It is already visible in ordinary communication. A brief response between subjects with a long shared history can invoke distinctions and experiences that are not contained lexically in the expression itself.

The epistemological importance of this structure lies in the relation between symbolic economy and relational density. A compact sign can function because the surrounding system supplies information that the sign does not encode internally.

Scriptural and dialogical texts can preserve part of that surrounding system by retaining narrative and interlocutory structure. The preserved frame thereby supports interpretations that would be unavailable from the minimal expression considered alone.

The epistemic trace can therefore be distributed across a textual relation rather than contained in one proposition.

6.11 Scripture as Selective Preservation of Generative Context

The preceding analysis suggests a limited epistemological interpretation of scriptural form. A scripture can preserve a teaching together with selected conditions of its represented emergence.

These conditions can include speaker, audience, place, occasion, question, response, repetition, dispute, narrative transition, and subsequent effect. Such preservation can make the text function differently from a doctrinal handbook containing only extracted propositions.

The distinction should not be romanticized. Scriptural narratives are selective. They can stylize encounters, organize authority, omit alternative voices, and reflect later transmission histories. The pres-

ence of narrative context therefore does not guarantee superior historical accuracy or epistemic completeness.

The concept of generative provenance does not require such a guarantee. Selective contextualization can remain epistemically important even when it is not an exhaustive historical record.

A scriptural frame can preserve how a tradition understands the relation between a teaching and the conditions of its articulation. This relation can be important for interpretation, practice, authority, or transmission even where modern historical reconstruction remains uncertain.

The epistemological question is consequently distinct from the historical one. Historical scholarship asks what events, textual layers, and transmission processes produced the extant text. The present analysis asks what relational information the extant textual form preserves and how that information conditions interpretation of its symbolic results.

Both questions can be necessary, but they should not be collapsed.

6.12 Transmission as a New Epistemic Trajectory

A preserved dialogue or scripture does not transmit an original epistemic trajectory unchanged. It becomes an encountered symbolic object within a new trajectory.

The reader approaches the text with different language, history, conceptual resources, practices, and questions. Translation can reorganize distinctions. Commentarial traditions can supply relations that are not explicit in the source text. Educational and ritual practices can alter which dimensions become salient.

Transmission is therefore generative rather than merely reproductive.

This point follows directly from the recursive structure developed in Section 4. The stabilized result of one historical trajectory becomes a condition within another. Narrative context can constrain and enrich the later trajectory, but it cannot determine it completely.

The same scripture can consequently generate different epistemic developments across historical communities without losing every form of continuity. Shared symbols and narrative structures provide inherited constraints, while new relations produce new articulations.

Generative provenance is therefore layered. The provenance of a later interpretation includes both the inherited textual trajectory and the history through which the later reader encountered and reconfigured it.

6.13 Trajectory Preservation and Hermeneutic Constraint

Preserving more of an epistemic trajectory can constrain interpretation.

An isolated proposition can support readings that become less plausible once its surrounding dialogue is restored. A response that appears universal can prove directed toward a particular interlocutor or problem. A silence that appears empty can become meaningful within a sequence. A doctrinal statement that appears final can be followed immediately by its qualification or reversal.

Context therefore limits some forms of semantic portability.

This loss of portability can be epistemically beneficial when it prevents a symbolic result from being applied outside the conditions under which it remains intelligible. It can also constrain productive reinterpretation if historical context is treated as fixing meaning permanently.

Trajectory preservation should therefore be understood as a hermeneutic resource rather than a complete interpretive algorithm. It adds relations that later interpretation must address. It does not eliminate interpretive plurality.

The balance between portability and contextual constraint is one of the central tensions of epistemic preservation.

6.14 From Complete Preservation to Sufficient Provenance

No textual form preserves an epistemic trajectory completely.

Dialogue omits unrecorded perceptions, affects, social conditions, and prior histories. Narrative framing selects a small number of contextual relations. Scripture is transmitted through material and institutional processes that introduce additional layers between represented event and extant text.

The relevant epistemic ideal therefore cannot be complete preservation.

A more defensible concept is *sufficient provenance*. Provenance is sufficient relative to an epistemic purpose when the preserved relations allow the result to remain intelligible, appropriately applicable, criticizable, or revisable at the level required by that purpose.

Sufficient provenance can differ across practices.

A mathematical result can require proof and definitions while requiring little biographical information concerning its discoverer. A scientific claim can require methodological and data provenance. A philosophical distinction can require the problem and competing formulations from which it emerged. A context-dependent practical teaching can require substantial information about the relation within which it was given.

The concept is therefore functional rather than absolute.

The question becomes which relations must remain accessible for the epistemic work expected of a symbolic result.

6.15 Limits of Dialogical and Scriptural Evidence

Several limitations should govern the use of dialogical and scriptural materials in the present argument.

First, literary sequence cannot be assumed to reproduce psychological sequence. A dialogue can be composed to generate a particular effect in readers without recording an actual historical conversation.

Second, narrative context does not provide transparent access to original epistemic experience. It provides a symbolic representation of context.

Third, textual richness does not entail epistemic superiority. An elaborate narrative can obscure a distinction that a concise proposition expresses more clearly.

Fourth, silence and minimal expression remain interpretively dependent upon context and should never be treated as independent evidence of epistemic depth.

Fifth, comparison across Platonic and Buddhist textual forms establishes no shared metaphysics, pedagogy, or theory of knowledge. The comparison concerns only selected structures of epistemic preservation.

These limitations are consistent with the argument rather than obstacles to it. The paper does not require access to an unsymbolized original trajectory. It requires only the distinction between symbolic forms that preserve different amounts and kinds of relational information concerning epistemic genesis.

6.16 Implications for the Epistemic Trace

Dialogical and scriptural preservation complicates the concept of the epistemic trace developed in the preceding section.

The trace need not be a single proposition. It can be distributed across a sequence of symbolic events.

A question can preserve an earlier state of the problem. A failed answer can preserve a conceptual boundary. A correction can preserve the direction of transformation. Narrative context can preserve occasion. An interlocutor can preserve the relational position from which a distinction became necessary. Silence can preserve the absence of a further verbal formulation while the preceding sequence supplies its interpretive conditions.

The epistemic trace can therefore possess internal temporal structure.

This structure matters because the order of symbolic events can itself carry information about knowing. Reordering the same statements into a systematic treatise can preserve much of their propositional content while changing the representation of their genesis.

The difference supports the paper's broader claim. Preservation of knowledge is not exhausted by preservation of conclusions. In some contexts, preserving how a conclusion became thinkable is part of preserving the epistemic function of the result.

The next section develops this problem beyond textual form. It examines the relation among epistemic trajectory, transformation of the subject, and the meaning of an epistemic result, with particular attention to cases in which symbolically equivalent expressions arise from substantially different histories of practice, encounter, and knowing.

7 Epistemic Trajectory and the Transformation of the Knowing Subject

The preceding sections have examined how epistemic results emerge through conditioned trajectories and how different symbolic forms preserve different amounts of generative provenance. This section turns to the subject who passes through such a trajectory. Its objective is to clarify how the process of knowing can transform the epistemic organization of the knower even when the final symbolic result is identical to a proposition available through a substantially different route.

The analysis therefore distinguishes semantic equivalence from equivalence of epistemic position. Two subjects can state the same proposition, understand its ordinary linguistic content, and even accept the same inferential consequences while differing in the histories through which the proposition became integrated into their epistemic organization. These differences can affect perception, judgment, practical discrimination, sensitivity to counterexamples, and the capacity to generate subsequent inquiry.

The distinction does not establish a hierarchy among epistemic trajectories. Testimony, instruction, textual inheritance, formal derivation, practical experience, and independent inquiry can all generate legitimate forms of knowing. The question concerns what additional transformations occur through a trajectory and when those transformations matter to the epistemic function under consideration.

7.1 Semantic Equivalence and Epistemic Position

A proposition can be shared across subjects while occupying different positions within their respective epistemic organizations.

Consider a proposition learned through direct instruction. A subject can understand its terms, accept the relevant evidence, and use the statement correctly. Another subject can arrive at the same proposition through a trajectory involving failed hypotheses, practical encounters, comparison among alternative explanations, and repeated conceptual revision.

At the level of semantic content, the resulting expressions can coincide. At the level of epistemic organization, the relation to the proposition can differ.

The second subject can possess distinctions generated through the history of inquiry that are absent from the final sentence. The subject can know which alternative formulations failed, which cases destabilized earlier accounts, and which assumptions became visible only through repeated attempts at explanation. These relations can affect how the proposition is later applied, qualified, criticized, or revised.

The first subject can acquire many of these capacities through subsequent instruction or practice. The distinction therefore does not divide subjects into fixed epistemic categories. It identifies a difference in the organization surrounding a proposition at a particular stage of development.

An epistemic result should consequently be distinguished from its *epistemic position*: the network of capacities, distinctions, expectations, practices, and historical relations through which the result functions for a subject.

7.2 Transformation Through Inquiry

An epistemic trajectory can modify the subject who participates in it.

The transformation can occur through conceptual differentiation. A subject develops categories that were previously unavailable. It can occur through perceptual learning, where repeated practice makes subtle differences newly salient. It can occur through methodological experience, where failed

approaches alter standards of evidence or expectations concerning explanation. It can also occur through changes in practical or interpretive orientation.

Such transformations are often only partially represented in the final proposition.

A scientific investigator can acquire sensitivity to experimental anomalies through a long sequence of observations. A legal practitioner can learn to recognize distinctions that remain difficult to state exhaustively outside concrete cases. A philosopher can become increasingly sensitive to an ambiguity after repeatedly discovering that apparently satisfactory formulations fail under comparison.

Polanyi's account of tacit knowing is relevant to these cases because epistemic competence can include integrations and discriminations that exceed what the subject can state explicitly at a particular moment [13]. The present argument extends the temporal dimension of that observation. Some of these capacities can themselves be generated through the trajectory that culminates in an explicit result.

Knowing can therefore leave a residue in the organization of the knower that is different from the symbolic residue preserved in the proposition.

7.3 Knowledge as Transformation of Future Possibility

The significance of subject transformation becomes particularly visible when future inquiry is considered.

A proposition acquired during one inquiry becomes part of the prior epistemic organization of later encounters. The same is true of distinctions, failed hypotheses, methodological habits, and perceptual sensitivities generated during the process.

The epistemic consequence of an inquiry therefore extends beyond what the subject can state immediately after its completion. The trajectory changes what can later become noticeable, surprising, problematic, or intelligible.

This recursive structure was introduced in Section 4. Its relevance here concerns the subject directly. Epistemic transformation changes the field of future possibilities available to the knower.

A subject who has encountered the limits of a concept can later recognize those limits in a new domain. A subject who has learned how a particular type of evidence can mislead can become sensitive to related failures elsewhere. A conceptual distinction developed through one problem can become the condition for recognizing another problem that was previously invisible.

The epistemic value of a trajectory can therefore include the questions it makes possible later.

This generative consequence cannot always be inferred from the immediate accuracy of the final result.

7.4 Arriving at a Distinction and Receiving a Distinction

The difference between trajectory and symbolic result can be clarified through the contrast between arriving at a distinction and receiving one.

A subject can encounter a conceptual difficulty, remain unable to identify its source, attempt several formulations, and eventually produce a distinction that makes the problem tractable. Another subject can receive the same distinction directly through teaching, testimony, or a text.

Both subjects can genuinely understand the resulting distinction.

Their trajectories nevertheless differ. The first subject has experienced several forms of conceptual insufficiency and has participated directly in the process through which the final boundary was established. The second begins with the stabilized boundary already available.

The difference can matter where later tasks require recognition of cases close to the boundary, diagnosis of failed formulations, or generation of new distinctions. It can matter less where the relevant task requires only reliable application of the result.

Receiving a distinction can also become the beginning of a new generative trajectory. A concept supplied by another subject can reorganize an unresolved experience, expose a previously unnoticed relation, and generate further questions. The distinction between receiving and arriving therefore concerns one segment of an epistemic history rather than two mutually exclusive forms of knowing.

Human epistemic development ordinarily combines both. Subjects inherit large symbolic structures and then generate new differentiations within them.

7.5 Testimony, Inheritance, and Compressed Trajectories

The distinction between epistemic trajectory and subject transformation must remain compatible with testimony and inherited knowledge.

No subject could reproduce independently the trajectories through which most available knowledge was generated. Language, mathematics, scientific results, historical records, legal concepts, philosophical distinctions, and practical skills are transmitted across generations precisely because symbolic stabilization permits later subjects to begin from earlier results.

Testimony therefore creates compressed epistemic trajectories.

A recipient can enter an inquiry at a stage that required extensive prior work for another subject or community. Such compression is one of the principal mechanisms through which knowledge accumulates.

The compressed trajectory can remain epistemically rich. A good explanation can transmit distinctions that would require years to rediscover independently. A proof can provide access to inferential relations without requiring the reader to reproduce the history of its discovery. A carefully structured education can make inherited results generative by placing them within relations that enable further inquiry.

The existence of compressed trajectories therefore does not constitute an epistemic defect.

The relevant question concerns what forms of transformation the recipient requires for the intended epistemic role. Reliable testimony can be sufficient for one purpose, while independent judgment, practical application, or generation of new theory can require additional integration.

7.6 Practice and Epistemic Integration

Some epistemic results acquire a different position when integrated through practice.

The term *practice* is used broadly here. It can refer to experimental work, mathematical problem solving, clinical judgment, artistic production, legal interpretation, contemplative practice, technical skill, or another repeated activity through which symbolic distinctions interact with concrete situations.

Practice can expose the limits of a proposition that appear only weakly in abstract formulation. It can establish discriminations among cases that share the same formal description. It can also produce tacit capacities that support later explicit judgment.

The relation between proposition and practice is recursive. Symbolic knowledge guides action, while encounters generated through action revise the meaning, scope, and application of symbolic knowledge.

This structure is especially important where competence depends upon more than the ability to state a rule. Polanyi's account of tacit knowing and Collins's analysis of different forms of tacit knowledge both demonstrate reasons why successful practice cannot always be reduced to possession of explicit instructions [13, 3].

The present paper does not infer that practical knowledge is epistemically superior to propositional knowledge. Practice constitutes one form through which a proposition can become integrated into a richer epistemic trajectory.

7.7 Transformative and Non-Transformative Acquisition

The preceding analysis permits a distinction between epistemic acquisition and epistemic transformation.

A subject can acquire a proposition without substantial reorganization of prior epistemic capacities. The proposition can be added to an existing body of knowledge and used successfully.

Other acquisitions alter the organization through which the subject subsequently interprets experience. A new concept can reorganize several previously unrelated observations. A historical discovery

can change the meaning assigned to earlier events. A philosophical distinction can render an entire class of prior questions unstable.

The difference is one of degree rather than an absolute binary.

Many epistemic events produce small transformations. Some produce extensive reorganization. Others remain largely local.

The concept of transformation is therefore useful only when its scale is specified. A proposition can transform one domain of judgment while leaving most of the subject's epistemic organization unchanged.

The final symbolic expression does not reliably indicate the magnitude of this transformation. A short sentence can reorganize a large conceptual field for one subject and remain a minor factual addition for another.

7.8 Generative Meaning and Subject History

Section 5 introduced *generative meaning* to describe the trajectory-dependent role that a symbolic expression can acquire within an epistemic organization. The present section permits a more precise formulation of that concept.

Generative meaning concerns what an expression can do within the subject's subsequent epistemic life.

A proposition can organize perception, generate new questions, establish a new contrast, modify practical judgment, or connect previously separate domains. These functions depend partly upon the relations into which the proposition is incorporated.

The same sentence can consequently have different generative consequences for different subjects.

This does not imply semantic relativism. The linguistic content of the proposition constrains its competent interpretation. Generative meaning concerns additional relations between that content and the subject's evolving epistemic organization.

A familiar proposition can acquire new generative meaning after a later experience. A concept learned years earlier can suddenly become relevant when a new encounter exposes a relation that had previously remained unavailable.

Epistemic history therefore changes the functional position of inherited symbols without requiring their semantic content to change correspondingly.

7.9 Symbolic Simplicity and Transformative Depth

The relation between trajectory and subject transformation provides another reason to separate symbolic complexity from epistemic depth.

An epistemically transformative result can be expressible through a simple statement. The symbolic economy of the expression can reflect successful conceptual stabilization after a highly complex trajectory.

A sophisticated expression can also be produced without producing substantial transformation in the subject who utters it. A person can reproduce technical language competently while the underlying distinctions remain weakly integrated into judgment or practice.

The difference cannot be determined reliably from style.

This issue is particularly important in domains where concise speech, technical complexity, or apparent simplicity carries social signals of expertise or wisdom. Symbolic form can become evidence used to infer an epistemic history that is not directly observable.

The present framework cautions against such inference. Provenance must be distinguished from performance.

A long trajectory can produce a simple trace. A short trajectory can produce a complex trace. The relation between trace and transformation remains an empirical and interpretive question.

7.10 Silence and Subject Transformation

The same caution applies to silence.

Section 6 showed that silence can acquire epistemic significance within a trajectory such as the dialogical sequence represented in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* [1]. The present analysis adds that the observable silence does not disclose the epistemic transformation of the silent subject by itself.

A long history of practice can culminate in silence. Ignorance can also culminate in silence. The same visible result remains compatible with substantially different epistemic organizations.

Interpretation therefore depends upon relational and historical evidence.

This point places a limit upon attempts to infer realization, expertise, or depth from minimal expression. The trajectory can make a silence meaningful within a textual or practical relation, while the silence alone cannot serve as a reliable measure of the subject's epistemic state.

The argument applies equally to verbal expression. Fluency does not establish transformation, and simplicity does not establish its absence.

7.11 Subject Transformation Without Final Proposition

An epistemic trajectory can transform a subject even when no stable final proposition emerges.

A failed inquiry can expose the insufficiency of previously accepted categories. A philosophical investigation can end in aporia while leaving the subject unable to return to the initial conceptual position. A practical encounter can change judgment without producing an explicit theory of the change.

Such cases are significant because they separate transformation from propositional success.

The epistemic outcome can consist partly in the loss of confidence in an earlier organization, increased sensitivity to unresolved distinctions, or a change in the field of questions the subject can recognize.

This form of development is difficult to represent through result-centered epistemology because its positive content can remain weakly stabilized.

A trajectory-oriented analysis can preserve it as a legitimate form of epistemic change without assuming that every unresolved state constitutes knowledge.

7.12 Path Dependence of Epistemic Subjectivity

The transformation of the subject is path-dependent because earlier epistemic events alter the conditions under which later events are interpreted.

Two subjects exposed to the same information can develop differently because their prior trajectories differ. A theoretical distinction can resolve a long-standing difficulty for one subject while remaining trivial for another. An objection can destabilize a framework for one reader and strengthen it for another because different assumptions are active in each case.

Path dependence does not imply that subjects become permanently enclosed within their histories. New encounters can reorganize earlier structures. Education, translation, dialogue, practice, and critical reflection can open trajectories that were previously unavailable.

The concept indicates that the epistemic effect of an event cannot be inferred from the event alone.

Subject, history, encounter, and symbolic form jointly contribute to the resulting transformation.

This structure is consistent with the paper's comparative use of dependent origination. Epistemic subjectivity is generated through conditions and relations rather than appearing as an invariant origin outside the trajectory.

7.13 Trajectory Depth and Epistemic Evaluation

The framework developed here does not provide a scalar measure of *trajectory depth*.

A trajectory can be long while repetitive and epistemically unproductive. A brief encounter can reorganize a subject profoundly. Extended difficulty can generate insight, confusion, fixation, or exhaustion.

Rapid articulation can represent superficial closure or exceptionally effective access to inherited conceptual resources.

Temporal duration therefore provides no reliable measure of epistemic depth.

Neither does subjective intensity. An emotionally powerful experience can be epistemically transformative, while intensity alone does not establish the reliability or adequacy of the resulting judgment.

A rigorous evaluation would require specification of the capacities relevant to the epistemic practice under consideration. These can include explanatory understanding, practical discrimination, inferential competence, sensitivity to evidence, capacity for revision, or ability to generate further inquiry.

The present framework therefore treats trajectory differences descriptively before attempting normative ranking.

7.14 Generative Provenance and Epistemic Assessment

Generative provenance becomes relevant to epistemic assessment when the expected function of a subject exceeds possession of a correct symbolic result.

If a task requires only accurate reproduction of a proposition, provenance can have little relevance. If a role requires judgment under novel conditions, diagnosis of conceptual failure, adaptation, explanation, or generation of new questions, information concerning the trajectory can become more significant.

This distinction appears in assessments of expertise. Correct answers to familiar cases provide evidence of competence, while performance under unexpected conditions can reveal whether the subject possesses a more generative organization.

The same issue appears in education. A learner can produce the expected answer through memorization, pattern recognition, guided reasoning, or independent conceptual reconstruction. The visible result alone can underdetermine which capacities have developed.

Generative provenance therefore supplies information about how an epistemic capacity was formed and what forms of future development it may support.

It should remain one source of evidence among others. Historical complexity does not guarantee current competence, and compressed acquisition does not imply shallow understanding.

7.15 The Relational Formation of the Knower

The preceding analysis supports a relational conception of the knowing subject.

The subject who eventually states a proposition is formed through encounters with other subjects, inherited languages, institutions, texts, practices, material environments, technologies, and earlier symbolic results. The subject's epistemic capacities therefore have a provenance that exceeds individual authorship.

This does not eliminate agency. Subjects select, judge, reject, reinterpret, combine, and create. The relevant point is that these capacities themselves develop through relations.

An insight can be individually articulated while remaining relationally generated.

This distinction is important for authorship and intellectual history. The subject who first stabilizes a concept in a particular form can perform genuine creative work even where the generative conditions of that work are widely distributed.

A relational account therefore need not erase individual contribution. It places contribution within the conditions that make it possible.

7.16 Boundary of the Transformative Account

The argument of this section is deliberately limited.

It establishes that epistemically equivalent symbolic results can arise through different trajectories and that those trajectories can produce different transformations in the knowing subject. It also establishes that some of these differences can matter for future inquiry, judgment, practical discrimination, and interpretation.

The argument does not establish that longer, more difficult, more personal, or more experiential trajectories are epistemically superior. It does not imply that testimony produces inferior knowledge, that inherited concepts should be rediscovered independently, or that transformation is necessary for every legitimate epistemic achievement.

The analysis also leaves open how transformations should be measured and which forms of transformation should count as epistemically valuable.

Its principal consequence is narrower. The epistemic state of a subject cannot always be inferred adequately from the symbolic result the subject produces. Where the epistemic function under evaluation includes judgment, understanding, adaptation, or further inquiry, trajectory and generative provenance can become relevant dimensions of analysis.

The next section develops the implications of this distinction for epistemic provenance under conditions in which sophisticated symbolic outputs can be generated with increasingly compressed or radically different trajectories. Particular attention is given to artificial intelligence as a case in which symbolic performance and human epistemic formation can become visibly decoupled.

8 Artificial Intelligence and the Reconfiguration of Epistemic Provenance

The preceding sections have distinguished symbolic result from epistemic trajectory, examined the selective preservation of generative provenance, and shown how epistemically equivalent expressions can arise from substantially different histories of knowing. Artificial intelligence provides a particularly important boundary case for this framework because contemporary generative systems can produce sophisticated symbolic outputs without reproducing the human trajectories of encounter, uncertainty, practice, conceptual struggle, and subject transformation examined earlier in the paper.

The purpose of this section is not to determine whether artificial systems possess knowledge, understanding, consciousness, or agency in any general sense. Those questions require independent philosophical and empirical arguments. The narrower issue concerns provenance. Whatever epistemic status is ultimately assigned to artificial systems, the generative history of an AI-produced proposition differs substantially from the history of a proposition that emerges through the human epistemic trajectories described in the preceding sections.

This difference makes visible a distinction that can remain less obvious in ordinary human communication. A highly developed symbolic result does not disclose, by its form alone, the kind of trajectory through which it was generated.

8.1 Symbolic Performance and Epistemic Genesis

Large language models can produce explanations, questions, distinctions, summaries, arguments, counterarguments, analogies, and other linguistically complex outputs. Such performance creates a strong temptation to infer the presence of familiar human epistemic processes from the form of the resulting language.

This inference requires caution.

Bender and Koller distinguish linguistic form from stronger claims concerning meaning and understanding and argue that successful manipulation of linguistic form does not by itself settle questions concerning semantic understanding [2]. Shanahan similarly cautions against importing ordinary anthropomorphic descriptions directly into the interpretation of large language model behavior [15].

The present paper does not need to resolve the broader dispute. Its argument is structural. Symbolic performance is observable at the level of output, while epistemic genesis concerns the trajectory through which the output becomes possible.

The same polished proposition can therefore remain compatible with multiple forms of provenance.

It can result from a human subject's prolonged inquiry. It can be copied from an existing text. It can be generated through a computational model. It can emerge from collaboration between several

human subjects. It can result from an iterative human–AI interaction in which the distinction is gradually reformulated.

Symbolic form alone underdetermines which of these trajectories occurred.

8.2 Computational Generation and Human Epistemic Trajectory

Artificial generation should not be described as the absence of a generative history. An AI output also has a history.

That history can include training data, model architecture, optimization, fine-tuning, system instructions, user prompts, retrieved documents, tool outputs, conversational context, sampling procedures, and other computational and institutional conditions. A generated proposition is therefore conditioned rather than originless.

The relevant distinction concerns the *kind* of trajectory involved.

A human epistemic trajectory can include perceptual encounter, affective disturbance, practical involvement, uncertainty, hesitation, failure, conceptual revision, embodied practice, interpersonal relation, and transformation of the subject’s future capacities. A computational generation trajectory is organized through different mechanisms and conditions.

The claim is therefore not that one trajectory is real while the other has no history. It is that the trajectories are not interchangeable merely because their symbolic results can coincide.

This distinction preserves the paper’s relational orientation. Artificial outputs also arise dependently through extensive configurations of prior conditions. The philosophical question concerns what kinds of relations are preserved or omitted when a computationally generated symbolic result enters human epistemic practice.

8.3 The Same Proposition Across Different Provenances

The distinction can be made precise through a case of symbolic equivalence.

Suppose a proposition is produced independently by three sources. A researcher arrives at it after years of theoretical work and empirical observation. A student reproduces the statement after reading the researcher’s publication. A language model generates the same sentence in response to a prompt.

At the level of literal expression, the outputs can be identical.

The identity of the sentence does not imply identity of provenance.

The researcher can possess memories of failed hypotheses, practical knowledge of the relevant methods, sensitivity to exceptional cases, and an understanding of why alternative formulations proved inadequate. The student can understand the proposition through a compressed trajectory supplied by testimony and instruction. The computational system has a different generative history involving its training and immediate inference conditions.

The sentence therefore fails to identify the epistemic position occupied by its producer.

This example should not be converted into a ranking of the three outputs. The proposition can remain true or useful regardless of its source. The distinction concerns what further epistemic capacities can reasonably be inferred from the fact that the proposition has been produced.

8.4 Artificial Generation as Extreme Epistemic Compression

Artificial generation can be understood as an especially visible form of epistemic compression from the perspective of the human user.

A user can receive in seconds a symbolic formulation that historically depended upon years or centuries of accumulated inquiry. The model does not recreate the human histories through which each inherited distinction originally emerged. It operates upon symbolic and other encoded resources produced through those histories and generates a new output under present computational conditions.

From the user’s perspective, the trajectory between unresolved problem and available formulation can therefore contract substantially.

A conceptual distinction that might otherwise require extensive reading, comparison, or discussion can become immediately accessible. An unfamiliar literature can be summarized. Several competing interpretations can be placed side by side. A possible objection can be generated before the user has independently articulated it.

This compression can be epistemically productive. It can release attention for more difficult inquiry, expose relations that would otherwise remain inaccessible, and provide conceptual resources at the moment when they become generative.

Compression can also alter the process through which the user becomes capable of making the distinction independently.

The significance of the change depends upon what the epistemic practice is intended to accomplish.

8.5 Receiving a Formulation Before Differentiating the Problem

The relation between artificial assistance and pre-articulated apprehension is particularly important.

A human subject can experience that an argument, interpretation, or conceptual structure is unstable without yet knowing how to articulate the instability. Under earlier conditions, the subject might remain with the problem, compare alternative formulations, consult texts, discuss the issue with others, and gradually develop a distinction.

An artificial system can supply a plausible distinction almost immediately.

The result can be highly beneficial. The supplied concept can name an epistemic difference that the subject could not have articulated alone and can open an inquiry that would otherwise remain blocked.

The same intervention changes the trajectory.

The subject can move from pre-articulated apprehension to symbolic stabilization through a distinction whose initial formulation was externally generated. The interval during which the subject independently attempts to differentiate the problem can become substantially shorter.

No general epistemic judgment follows from this change. The compressed trajectory can produce superior learning, superficial acceptance, further generative inquiry, or some combination of these outcomes.

The relevant distinction is between receiving a formulation and undergoing the specific trajectory through which that formulation would otherwise have been generated.

8.6 Artificial Intelligence and the Epistemic Trace

Artificially generated text complicates the concept of the epistemic trace introduced in Section 5.

In the human case examined earlier, a proposition can be described as a trace of a trajectory involving encounter, differentiation, and symbolic stabilization. An AI-generated proposition can reproduce the form of such a trace without reproducing the same kind of originating trajectory.

The expression can therefore be *trace-like* at the level of symbolic form while possessing a different generative provenance.

This distinction is especially important when the output reproduces stylistic features associated with particular epistemic histories. A system can generate the language of hesitation, self-correction, philosophical modesty, experiential reflection, expertise, or contemplative restraint. These forms can be appropriate to the requested discourse without establishing that the system underwent the human histories ordinarily associated with them.

A linguistic marker of epistemic history can therefore become separable from the history it conventionally indicates.

This possibility creates a new provenance problem. Readers can no longer infer a particular generative history confidently from symbolic style alone.

8.7 Generated Signs of Epistemic Depth

Section 7 argued that symbolic complexity, simplicity, and silence provide insufficient evidence of trajectory depth. Generative artificial systems intensify this problem because many conventional signs of epistemic depth can themselves be produced symbolically.

A model can generate elaborate technical language. It can also generate concise language. It can produce qualifications, disclaimers, expressions of uncertainty, self-corrections, or statements emphasizing the limits of language.

None of these forms provides sufficient evidence concerning the provenance that produced them.

The distinction should be stated without attributing deception to the system. A generated expression can resemble the linguistic form through which a human subject ordinarily communicates a particular epistemic stance. The resemblance does not establish identity of the underlying trajectory.

Shanahan’s caution concerning anthropomorphic interpretations of large language model behavior is relevant here [15]. Human-like language invites human-like interpretation precisely because ordinary linguistic interaction normally presupposes another human subject with a history of perception, intention, and social participation.

Generative systems make that presupposition less reliable.

8.8 Provenance of Training Materials

Artificial generation also introduces a second meaning of provenance.

The generative provenance developed in this paper concerns the history through which an epistemic result acquires its form and significance. AI research uses the term *data provenance* more specifically to describe the lineage, sources, licensing conditions, creators, and subsequent transformations of training datasets.

Recent large-scale work has shown that tracing such lineage is itself a substantial problem. Longpre and colleagues audited more than 1,800 text datasets and documented significant gaps and inconsistencies in licensing and attribution information [8].

Data provenance and generative epistemic provenance should remain distinct.

Knowing which datasets contributed to model development does not reconstruct the full generative relation through which a particular output was produced. Conversely, understanding a user’s prompt and conversational trajectory does not reveal the complete lineage of the symbolic materials that made model generation possible.

AI outputs therefore possess layered provenance.

At least three levels can become relevant: the provenance of training and fine-tuning resources, the computational and institutional provenance of the model, and the local interactional provenance through which the present output was generated.

8.9 Interactional Provenance

In conversational use, a further trajectory develops between user and system.

A user poses a question. The system produces a formulation. The user rejects part of it, introduces a new distinction, changes the scope, or provides a counterexample. The next output depends upon that intervention. Across repeated turns, the conceptual structure of the inquiry can change substantially.

The resulting artifact cannot always be attributed adequately to either the initial human question or one isolated system output.

Its provenance is interactional.

This structure resembles dialogue in one limited respect. Later symbolic states depend upon earlier exchanges. The comparison should remain cautious because human dialogue and computational dialogue involve different kinds of subjects and generative processes.

The structural point nevertheless matters. A human–AI conversation can become a trajectory-bearing record in which conceptual distinctions emerge across successive interactions.

The final proposition can therefore be generated through a hybrid trajectory containing human judgment, computational generation, inherited symbolic resources, corrections, rejected alternatives, and iterative reformulation.

Such cases make simple categories of authorship and epistemic origin increasingly difficult to apply without further analysis.

8.10 Human Judgment Within Hybrid Epistemic Trajectories

Hybrid trajectories place particular importance upon the distribution of judgment.

An artificial system can propose multiple formulations, while the human subject selects among them. The system can identify literature, while the human subject determines which sources are relevant. The system can generate objections, while the human subject evaluates whether the objections expose a real difficulty.

The epistemic role of the human subject therefore cannot be determined simply by measuring the quantity of text personally written.

A short human intervention can reorganize a large volume of generated material. Conversely, extensive editing can occur without substantial independent judgment if the conceptual structure remains externally supplied.

The relevant analytical question concerns where distinctions are generated, where they are evaluated, where errors are detected, and where the direction of subsequent inquiry is determined.

This distribution forms part of generative provenance.

It also explains why a binary distinction between “human-generated” and “AI-generated” can be insufficient for analyzing complex epistemic artifacts.

8.11 Provenance and Epistemic Responsibility

The distinction between origin and responsibility requires particular care.

An epistemic result can be relationally generated while responsibility for its use remains concentrated in particular agents or institutions. A researcher can rely extensively upon instruments, collaborators, databases, and artificial systems while remaining responsible for claims presented under the researcher’s authorship.

Generative dependence therefore does not eliminate epistemic responsibility.

The present framework can instead make responsibility more precise by identifying which components of a result were supplied, evaluated, verified, or transformed by different participants.

Provenance records can become relevant where readers need to determine whether an author independently evaluated a generated claim, whether external sources were consulted, whether a system supplied the initial conceptual structure, or whether the final argument resulted from substantial iterative revision.

The appropriate degree of disclosure depends upon the epistemic practice. Scientific reproducibility, academic authorship, educational assessment, and private exploratory thinking can require different provenance information.

No universal disclosure rule is derived here.

8.12 Opacity and the Limits of Provenance Reconstruction

Complete reconstruction of artificial generative provenance is difficult for reasons that differ from the limitations of human autobiographical reconstruction.

Model training can involve extremely large datasets, many optimization steps, multiple stages of fine-tuning, and institutional processes unavailable to the end user. The causal contribution of particular training examples to a specific generated sentence is generally difficult to isolate.

Dataset lineage itself can also be incompletely documented [8].

The local interaction is more accessible. Prompts, retrieved documents, generated alternatives, corrections, and subsequent revisions can often be preserved directly.

Generative provenance in AI-mediated inquiry is therefore unevenly observable.

Some layers are documented with considerable precision. Others remain opaque, distributed, or practically irreconstructible.

This situation resembles the broader argument of the paper in one respect: complete provenance is rarely available. The epistemic task is to identify which levels of provenance are sufficient for the purpose under consideration.

8.13 Epistemic Provenance and Trust

The separation between symbolic form and generative history also affects trust.

In ordinary human interaction, linguistic performance often functions as evidence concerning competence, experience, or epistemic position. A detailed technical explanation can support an inference that the speaker understands the subject. A well-formed qualification can suggest awareness of uncertainty. A careful distinction can suggest familiarity with the relevant conceptual terrain.

Generative systems weaken the reliability of some of these inferences because the relevant linguistic forms can be generated without the corresponding human history.

Trust can consequently require greater attention to provenance, verification, institutional accountability, and the relations through which the output is embedded.

This does not imply that AI-generated statements are intrinsically untrustworthy. It implies that surface form supplies weaker evidence concerning the generative history behind the statement than it did under conditions where human production could be assumed more confidently.

The distinction creates a bridge between epistemic provenance and subsequent work on trust, although a full theory of trust lies beyond the present paper.

8.14 Artificial Intelligence and Generative Meaning

AI-mediated inquiry also clarifies the trajectory-dependent concept of generative meaning developed earlier.

A generated proposition can initially have limited integration into the user's epistemic organization. Through discussion, verification, practical application, and later encounters, the same proposition can acquire increasing generative significance.

The relevant trajectory therefore need not terminate when the artificial system produces the output.

Generation and knowing can occur at different moments.

A subject can receive a distinction first and only later come to understand why it matters. The externally produced symbolic form becomes a condition for a subsequent human epistemic trajectory.

This possibility prevents the framework from treating AI assistance as a simple replacement of knowing by output production. Artificially generated symbols can become genuine materials within human processes of knowing.

The central issue concerns what happens after the symbol enters the relation.

8.15 Knowledge Production Without Equivalent Human Genesis

Artificial intelligence makes possible an increasingly important structural separation between the production of knowledge-like symbolic artifacts and the human genesis of those artifacts.

The phrase *knowledge-like* is used cautiously. It refers to outputs that can function within practices ordinarily associated with knowledge, such as explanation, argument, classification, summarization, or hypothesis generation. The term does not settle whether the artificial system itself should be described as knowing.

The philosophical importance of the separation lies elsewhere.

Human institutions can increasingly obtain sophisticated symbolic results without requiring a human subject to undergo an equivalent trajectory for each result.

This development challenges any tacit assumption that the presence of a sophisticated proposition provides evidence that some human subject has already lived through the epistemic formation ordinarily associated with producing it.

The producer of symbolic form and the bearer of human epistemic transformation can become different nodes within the same relational system.

8.16 The Preservation of Human Epistemic Trajectories

The preceding distinction raises a normative question that the present paper does not resolve.

If human epistemic trajectories can increasingly be bypassed in the production of useful symbolic results, should those trajectories nevertheless be preserved?

A positive answer cannot be derived merely from the fact that such trajectories have historically existed. Nor does their constitutive role in some forms of human knowing establish unconditional normative value.

Preservation might be justified where trajectories develop capacities for judgment, conceptual revision, practical discrimination, autonomy, creativity, or future question formation. In other contexts, compression can be desirable because it removes unnecessary cognitive labor.

The question therefore depends upon which epistemic capacities and forms of subjectivity are valued.

This normative problem belongs primarily to subsequent work. The present paper supplies the prior distinction required to formulate it coherently.

8.17 Provenance-Preserving AI-Mediated Inquiry

The framework also suggests a constructive possibility. Artificially mediated inquiry need not preserve only final outputs.

Conversational histories can retain the development of questions, failed formulations, revisions, supplied evidence, rejected alternatives, and changes in conceptual structure. Source links and retrieval records can preserve parts of evidential provenance. Version histories can show how an argument changed over time.

Such records can function as trajectory-bearing artifacts analogous, in a limited structural sense, to the dialogical preservation examined in Section 6.

The comparison should remain narrow. A machine-mediated conversation does not thereby become equivalent to Platonic dialogue or Buddhist scripture. The shared feature is simply that sequential preservation can retain information about epistemic development that disappears from the final proposition.

AI-mediated scholarship can therefore produce both radical compression and unusually detailed records of conceptual evolution.

These tendencies coexist.

The epistemic significance of the resulting archive depends upon how it is selected, interpreted, and connected to human judgment.

8.18 Boundary of the Artificial Intelligence Case

The role of artificial intelligence in this paper is diagnostic rather than foundational.

The argument concerning epistemic trajectory does not depend upon artificial intelligence. Differences between proposition and provenance already exist in testimony, education, textual transmission, dialogue, expertise, and historical knowledge.

Artificial systems make the distinction unusually visible because symbolic performance can be produced through mechanisms whose relation to human epistemic development is clearly non-identical.

The section therefore establishes four limited conclusions.

First, symbolic equivalence does not establish equivalence of generative provenance.

Second, artificial generation has a provenance of its own, including training, computational, institutional, and interactional layers.

Third, human–AI inquiry can generate hybrid trajectories in which judgment, articulation, verification, and conceptual development are distributed across different components of the relation.

Fourth, the epistemic significance of AI-mediated compression depends upon the function expected of the human subject and cannot be inferred solely from the quality of the final symbolic output.

These conclusions leave unresolved whether artificial systems know, understand, intend, or possess epistemic agency in a philosophically relevant sense. They also leave open the normative status of preserving human epistemic formation.

The final section returns to the paper’s broader argument. It summarizes the relation among dependent emergence, contingency, pre-articulated apprehension, symbolic stabilization, generative provenance, and subject transformation, and clarifies what it means to study knowing before the proposition.

9 Conclusion

This paper has examined knowing from the perspective of its emergence rather than beginning exclusively from the proposition through which an epistemic result is eventually expressed. Its central problem has concerned the interval between historically conditioned epistemic organization and symbolic stabilization: the processes through which an encounter becomes significant, a difference becomes apprehensible, an unresolved relation becomes articulable, and a relatively stable epistemic result becomes available for communication, criticism, transmission, and further inquiry.

The analysis began by distinguishing an epistemic result from an epistemic trajectory. A proposition, definition, distinction, model, or judgment can preserve an important epistemic outcome while leaving much of the history through which that outcome became possible outside its explicit symbolic content. The relevant trajectory can include prior conceptual organization, perceptual and practical familiarity, memory, social relation, affect, contingent encounter, failed interpretation, conceptual differentiation, question formation, and repeated attempts at articulation.

This distinction does not diminish the importance of propositional knowledge. Symbolic stabilization is one of the principal conditions of cumulative epistemic practice. A proposition can travel beyond the circumstances of its formation, enter new inferential systems, become available to subjects who did not participate in its discovery, and provide a condition for subsequent knowledge. The portability of symbolic results is therefore itself generative.

The same portability creates an epistemological asymmetry. The result can remain available after much of its generative provenance has disappeared. The final symbolic form can consequently be far more compact than the history through which it emerged.

The concept of *pre-articulated apprehension* was introduced to clarify one dimension of this trajectory. An epistemic change can begin before a subject possesses an adequate symbolic account of what has changed. A discrepancy can become operative, an existing interpretation can lose stability, or a relation can acquire significance while the relevant conceptual distinction remains uncertain.

The paper has deliberately limited the metaphysical implications of this claim. Pre-articulated apprehension does not require a pure cognitive domain prior to all language, history, or symbolic mediation. A subject can be deeply shaped by existing symbolic organizations while lacking a stable symbolic form for a new epistemic difference. The distinction among the not-yet-symbolized, the partially symbolizable, and the symbolically irreducible is therefore essential. The present argument depends primarily upon the first two and leaves stronger claims concerning intrinsic ineffability open.

Symbolic formation was subsequently treated as part of epistemic genesis itself. Formulation can differentiate an initially unstable apprehension, establish a conceptual boundary, generate a determinate question, expose an assumption, or make possible comparisons that were unavailable before articulation. The transition toward a proposition therefore involves epistemic work.

This productive function of symbolization also explains why the final proposition cannot always be interpreted as a transparent reproduction of a completed prior content. The proposition is produced through the trajectory and can transform the organization from which it emerges.

The concept of *epistemic compression* was used to describe the resulting relation. A temporally and relationally extended process becomes represented through a comparatively compact symbolic object. Such compression is often irreversible. The final proposition ordinarily does not contain enough information to reconstruct the complete history of encounters, failed formulations, distinctions, and revisions through which it became possible.

The resulting symbolic form was therefore characterized as an *epistemic trace*. A trace preserves consequences of a generative process without reproducing that process in its entirety. This formulation permits symbolic results to retain their epistemic validity and usefulness while making their incompleteness as records of epistemic genesis conceptually visible.

The paper has also situated this account within a broader analysis of conditioned emergence. Buddhist accounts of dependent origination provide an important comparative resource because they permit emergence to be understood through conditions without assigning complete explanatory priority to a self-sufficient origin. Yogācāra accounts of dispositions and manifestation provide a further comparative structure for understanding how operative conditions can precede their manifest effects and how manifestation can alter conditions for subsequent emergence.

These comparisons remain intentionally limited. The epistemic framework developed here is not presented as a translation of Buddhist doctrine, and the concepts of dependent emergence, epistemic organization, and recursive formation do not replace the doctrinal functions of *pratītyasamutpāda*, *bīja*, or *ālayavijñāna*. Their relevance lies in opening comparative conceptual possibilities concerning conditioned genesis, continuity, manifestation, and the absence of a self-sufficient epistemic origin.

Contingency occupies an equally important position within this framework. Epistemic genesis is conditioned without being exhausted by prior structure. A subject can possess conceptual and practical resources that make an insight possible while a particular encounter, conversation, comparison, failure, or change of context determines which possibility becomes locally active.

Contingency in this account does not refer to an absence of conditions. It describes the openness through which historically formed capacities enter configurations whose epistemic consequences cannot be read directly from those capacities in isolation.

This relation between conditioning and contingency provides one reason that epistemic trajectories are path-dependent. What becomes significant at one moment depends partly upon what has already occurred, while a new event can reorganize the meaning of earlier structures and alter the possibilities of later inquiry.

The generative process is therefore recursive. An epistemic result becomes part of the organization through which subsequent knowing develops. A new distinction changes what can later be distinguished. A failed explanation changes sensitivity to later evidence. An inherited symbolic system makes new questions possible. Knowing contributes to the conditions of further knowing.

The paper has described the historically relevant components of this process through the concept of *generative provenance*. Generative provenance concerns the relations through which an epistemic result acquires its form, significance, and position within subsequent inquiry. It includes more than source attribution, while remaining substantially narrower than an exhaustive causal history.

The importance of provenance depends upon epistemic purpose. Some results can be used appropriately with very limited knowledge of their histories. Other forms of knowledge become difficult to interpret, apply, or revise when the problem, context, practice, or conceptual trajectory that generated them is lost.

The analysis of dialogical and scriptural forms made this distinction especially visible. Dialogue can preserve questions, failed responses, corrections, changes of position, and unresolved inquiry. Narrative framing can preserve occasion, interlocutor, and represented context. Aporia can preserve the transformation of a problem even when no final positive definition emerges. Silence can acquire epistemic significance when a textual trajectory supplies the relations required for its interpretation.

These forms do not preserve an original epistemic event transparently. Dialogues and scriptures are themselves symbolic constructions shaped by literary form, selection, transmission, translation, interpretation, and institutional history. Their importance for the present argument lies in their capacity to

preserve forms of relational and temporal information that are usually absent from an isolated proposition.

The concept of sufficient provenance follows from this limitation. Complete preservation of an epistemic trajectory is neither possible nor generally necessary. The relevant question concerns which relations must remain available for a symbolic result to retain the intelligibility, applicability, criticizability, or revisability required within a particular epistemic practice.

The analysis then extended from preservation of the trajectory to transformation of the subject. Epistemic development can alter capacities that remain absent from the proposition produced at the end of inquiry. A subject can develop finer discrimination, sensitivity to failure, practical competence, historical awareness, or an increased capacity to generate new questions.

This observation explains why symbolic equivalence does not entail equivalence of epistemic position. Two subjects can state the same proposition while differing in the conceptual, practical, historical, and generative relations through which that proposition functions within their respective epistemic organizations.

No hierarchy follows automatically from this difference. Receiving a distinction through testimony can constitute genuine knowledge. Symbolic inheritance allows later subjects to begin from results that earlier subjects required substantial effort to produce. Education, archives, institutions, and division of epistemic labor depend upon such compression.

The distinction becomes important when an epistemic role requires capacities that exceed accurate reproduction of the result. Judgment under novel conditions, recognition of boundary cases, conceptual revision, practical discrimination, explanation, and generation of subsequent inquiry can depend upon forms of integration that the proposition alone does not reveal.

Artificial intelligence makes this distinction unusually visible. Contemporary generative systems can produce sophisticated symbolic artifacts through trajectories substantially different from the human histories of embodied encounter, uncertainty, practical transformation, and subject formation examined in this paper.

This difference does not establish that artificial systems lack knowledge, understanding, or epistemic agency. Those questions remain outside the argument developed here. The narrower conclusion is that symbolic sophistication does not disclose generative provenance.

Artificial outputs possess their own histories, including training data, computational architectures, optimization procedures, institutional conditions, prompts, retrieved materials, and interactional context. Human and computational trajectories should therefore be distinguished without treating one as conditioned and the other as originless.

Human–AI interaction introduces a further complication. Epistemic trajectories can become hybrid. A human subject can supply the initial problem, a system can generate possible distinctions, the subject can reject or revise them, external sources can introduce further constraints, and subsequent outputs can depend upon the accumulated interaction.

In such cases, the final symbolic artifact can have distributed generative provenance. The relevant epistemic questions concern where distinctions arose, how they were evaluated, which elements were verified, how conceptual direction changed, and what transformations occurred in the human participants.

This analysis also identifies an important open normative problem. Increasing ability to generate epistemically useful symbolic results without equivalent human trajectories raises the question of which forms of human epistemic formation remain worth preserving. The present paper does not answer that question.

A justification for preserving curiosity, epistemic friction, independent problem formation, or extended processes of inquiry requires additional normative premises concerning agency, education, judgment, creativity, subjectivity, or other epistemic goods. Structural significance alone does not establish normative necessity.

Several broader limitations of the present inquiry should therefore remain explicit.

The paper does not offer a complete theory of knowledge. It does not establish a universal sequence through which all knowing develops. It does not identify pre-articulated apprehension with one psy-

chological or neuroscientific mechanism. It does not provide a general theory of ineffability. It does not claim that every epistemic trajectory deserves preservation, that extended inquiry is superior to compressed acquisition, or that provenance determines the truth of a proposition.

The argument instead establishes a conceptual distinction that becomes increasingly important when symbolic production and epistemic formation can no longer be assumed to coincide.

A proposition tells us something. It can state a conclusion, preserve a distinction, transmit a result, and become a condition for further inquiry. What it ordinarily does not tell us by itself is how that conclusion became possible, why the distinction became necessary, what failed before the result stabilized, which encounters changed the trajectory, or how the subject was transformed through the process.

Knowing therefore has a history that can exceed the symbolic result through which it is preserved.

To study knowing *before the proposition* is to study that history of emergence: the conditions from which an epistemic difference becomes possible, the contingencies through which it becomes active, the pre-articulated transformations through which it begins to take form, the symbolic work through which it becomes stable, and the recursive effects through which the resulting knowledge becomes a condition for what can later be known.

The resulting perspective can be stated in a deliberately limited form: preserving knowledge is sometimes more than preserving what has been concluded. Where the trajectory contributes to understanding, interpretation, judgment, revision, or subsequent inquiry, preservation can also require attention to how the possibility of knowing was generated.

The proposition remains indispensable. It is simply not always the beginning of knowing, and it is not always the whole of what knowing leaves behind.

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