

The Degeneration of Relational Asymmetry

A Taxonomy of Coldness and Arrogance by Dimension of Degradation

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Abstract

Among those most invested with the expectation of help, the physician being the recurring instance, one sometimes meets two postures easily confused: coldness, a withdrawal, and arrogance, a settling into height. This paper asks whether the two are the same thing wearing different faces, or two degenerations with distinct mechanisms, and it approaches the question by classification. Working within a framework that takes being to be at once generative and relational, it treats relationality as holding a transcendental priority: as the condition under which difference and constraint can be posited at all, upon which the possibility of structural evolution, which is generativity, emerges. That priority is itself offered as a questionable premise, held open and not settled. On this footing degeneration is defined as the contraction of that possibility, and the two dimensions, the generative and the relational, serve as the axes of a taxonomy. Coldness and arrogance are then found to fall on different axes: arrogance appearing where the relational dimension degrades, a position ceasing to have its direction returned and ossifying into a supposed property of its occupant; one class of coldness appearing where the generative dimension degrades, the relation still holding while it no longer produces. Because the two dimensions mutually constitute one another in occurrence, a single posture is reachable by more than one path, so that the mechanisms are plural. The paper does not assert that this structure is the truth of arrogance. It proposes the structure as a candidate and asks whether the established accounts, from recognition, from disposition, from internalized oppression, from the psychoanalysis of the gaze and of narcissism, from the political economy of extraction, can be recovered as its projections, each such mapping being a place at which the structure, should the mapping fail, would be shown to be wrong.

Keywords: relational asymmetry; arrogance; coldness; generativity; relationality; ossification; taxonomy; recognition; narcissism.

A note on the standing of this paper. This is a conjecture pursued by classification. It takes two relational postures that settle upon those who occupy a position of giving, coldness and arrogance, and asks whether they share a mechanism or differ in one, using the two dimensions of a generative-relational account of being as the axes along which to sort them. Three cautions govern the whole. The account does not claim to be the truth of these postures; it proposes a structure and exposes it to refutation by asking that existing theories be recoverable as its projections, so that a failed projection counts against the structure. The priority it accords to relation is transcendental, a priority of possibility and of possibility alone, entered as a premise open to challenge and not as a demonstrated ground. And the account is dynamical throughout, in a sense to be kept apart from the moral: it concerns the conditions under which a relation degrades, and leaves aside the worth of anyone caught in the degradation. One further reservation belongs here. The taxonomy sorts the two postures along the two dimensions through which the framework takes being to be constituted, the generative and the relational; it does not claim that this cut is the best available, or that no other cut would sort the postures as well or better. The cut is the one the framework's own constitution offers, and it is put forward to be worked with and tested, without any claim to optimality. Objection, correction, and counter-evidence are welcome at huangwanhong@serendip.ngo.

1 INTRODUCTION

The prevailing ways of accounting for arrogance treat it as a trait of character or as an expression of power: the arrogant person is proud, or the arrogant person is strong, and in either telling the posture is read off from something the person has. Both accounts leave a gap. Pride and power are widespread and arrogance is uncommon, so that neither can be simply what arrogance is; and both pass over the most telling fact about the posture, that among people of equal competence and equal placement, some harden into it and some never do. An account that cannot say why the eminent surgeon who is daily corrected by her residents stays clear of arrogance, while another of equal standing settles into it, has yet to find the variable that matters.

This paper approaches arrogance, and the coldness with which it is easily confused, from a starting point in the relation itself, in what the relation does. The starting point is supplied by a framework, generative relational being, that takes subject, meaning, and value to emerge through relational process, in place of standing as properties prior to relation; and the wager of the paper is that the postures which settle upon those who occupy a lasting position of giving are best understood as degradations of that process. The occasion for the inquiry is a common and unsettling observation. Among the people most invested with the expectation of help, physicians being the sharpest instance, one meets, often enough, its opposite: sometimes a coldness that withdraws, sometimes an arrogance that surveys from a height. The observation is easily moralized, and just as easily excused; what it has seldom been is *sorted*.

Sorting it is the question of this paper. Are coldness and arrogance one hardening seen from two angles, or two different degradations that happen to befall the same position? The question matters because the two invite opposite responses, the one a depletion to be replenished, the other a lock to be broken, and because answering it calls for a way of telling relational degradations apart by their mechanism, in place of a verdict on either posture. The paper's proposal is that the two dimensions through which generative relational being is constituted, the generative and the relational, furnish exactly such a way: that coldness and arrogance can be located as degradations on different dimensions, and that once so located, their difference in mechanism becomes legible.

The contribution is accordingly a taxonomy, and its standing is deliberately modest. The paper makes no claim that this taxonomy is the truth of coldness and arrogance, and none that it overturns the established accounts of them. It offers the taxonomy as a candidate structure and submits it to a test: if the structure has any purchase, the existing accounts, from recognition, from disposition, from internalized oppression, from the psychoanalysis of the gaze and of narcissism, from the political economy of extraction, should be recoverable as its projections, as what it looks like when one or another of its dimensions is dropped from view. Each such recovery is a checkable commitment, and a recovery that fails is a point at which

the structure is shown to be wrong. The aim is to ask whether a single structure can stand behind these accounts, and to expose that structure, at named points, to refutation.

Two cautions govern the whole and are stated once here. The account is a conjecture throughout, put forward because it seems to organize the phenomena better than the alternatives and offered in a form built to be refuted; the reader is asked to weigh it. And the account is dynamical, in a sense held apart from the moral: to say that a configuration tends to produce a posture leaves the person caught in the configuration unaccused, and the humble occupant will turn out, on this telling, to be the differently situated one. The remainder proceeds as follows. §2 sets out the framework the paper works within and the family of phenomena to which the two postures belong. §3 fixes the two postures and the order of inquiry, taxonomy before unification. §4 sets down the two dimensions and the transcendental priority of relation on which the taxonomy rests. §5 builds the taxonomy and locates coldness and arrogance upon it. §6 develops the relational degradation that yields arrogance; §7 asks why some occupants degrade and others do not, and answers without appeal to virtue. §8 exposes the structure to refutation by asking the existing accounts to appear as its projections. §9 follows the guarding of authority that the running instance contained, lets it open a second coordinate the two dimensions do not supply, and states what the taxonomy does not reach. §10 states the trigger the account leaves unsettled, its limits, and the questions it leaves for later work.

2 BACKGROUND: GENERATIVE RELATIONAL BEING AND THE FAMILY OF DEGRADATIONS

The framework within which the two postures are examined is generative relational being, a theory of how subject, meaning, value, creation, and normativity co-emerge through generative relational processes. Its point of departure is a refusal. It declines to take the subject as given prior to its relations, or meaning as residing in a sign prior to its use, or value as a property borne by a thing prior to the relation in which it comes to matter. What these have in common, on this view, is that each is standardly treated as an entity that exists first and enters relations second; and generative relational being reverses the order, holding that subject, meaning, and value are generated in and through relational processes. The framework is in this sense doubly specified by its name. It is *relational* in that relation is prior to the terms it relates; it is *generative* in that what relation does exceeds the mere connecting of pre-existing things and reaches to production, bringing into being subjects, meanings, and values that were not there before the relating.

For the purposes of this paper two features of the framework carry the weight, and both will be developed formally in §4. The first is that being, on this account, is constituted along two dimensions at once: a relational dimension, concerning how difference and connection are posited and sustained between terms, and a generative dimension, concerning how new

subject, meaning, and value emerge upon those relations. These are two aspects of one process, and, this is the second feature, the two are not symmetric. Relation holds a priority over generation, a priority of a particular and carefully delimited kind, which §4 will specify as transcendental. It is this two-dimensional constitution, together with the asymmetry within it, that the taxonomy of this paper will put to work: if being is generative-relational along two dimensions, then the degradation of being should be analyzable as degradation along one dimension or the other, and the postures this paper sorts should find their places accordingly.

The two postures belong, finally, to a larger family the framework brings into view: the family of relational degradations. Once subject, meaning, and value are seen as generated through relational process, a distinctive kind of failure becomes visible, the failure of a process to continue generating, which is other than the failure of a thing to have a property. Trust that no longer repairs itself, a silence that isolates without any act of exclusion, a bond that hardens into a fixed hierarchy, the internalization by which the demeaned come to author their own diminishment: these form variations on a single theme, the degradation of a generative relation into something that no longer generates. Coldness and arrogance are two members of this family, met at a particular site, the position of one who is chronically depended upon, and the present paper is, in the largest view, a study of how to tell the members of that family apart. It takes the two that settle upon the giver, and asks by what dimension of the underlying process each has failed.

3 THE POSTURES AND THE ORDER OF INQUIRY

This paper concerns the high side of a lasting asymmetry, and two postures that settle upon the one who occupies it. The first is coldness, a withdrawal from the one who approaches. The second is arrogance, a bearing from which the visitor is surveyed as though from a settled height. They are easily run together, and a first temptation is to treat them as one thing, a single hardening, seen from two angles.

The temptation should be resisted until it is earned. Coldness and arrogance may be one mechanism with two faces, or they may be two degenerations that happen to share a location; and which of these holds cannot be decided by inspecting the postures, only by asking what in each has degraded. This paper therefore proceeds by classification before unification. It first fixes the dimensions along which a relation can be said to degrade, and only then asks where on those dimensions each posture falls, and whether they fall together or apart. Unification, if it comes, must be a finding of the taxonomy and never a premise of it.

The setting in which the two postures are most concentrated, and which will serve throughout as the running instance, is the position of chronic giving, the physician at a leading hospital being the clearest case. The choice is not made because the postures are peculiar to medicine, for they are common elsewhere; it is made because the configuration is there in a dense form.

Each day brings many who request the physician's help, await the physician's decision, and, when things go well, give thanks. The relation the physician inhabits, hour upon hour, has a constant shape: many depend upon me. What such a position does to the one who holds it, and why it sometimes issues in coldness and sometimes in arrogance and sometimes in neither, is the phenomenon to be sorted.

The physician stands in for a wider class, and it is worth naming its members, since the shared shape is what matters. The teacher whose students chronically rely on her, the priest to whom the congregation comes for solace, the judge before whom parties wait for a ruling, the senior social worker or the philanthropist to whom the needy apply, the therapist sought for healing, the reviewer whose word settles a value, the veteran engineer summoned to every crisis: each occupies a position defined by being turned to for something others lack. What binds them is more than eminence. Each holds a role whose very name presupposes the asymmetry, the role of one who rescues, teaches, judges, heals, or saves; and a role so defined has trouble finding a place for return, since a return would seem to unsettle the asymmetry the role is built on. How is a patient to instruct a physician, a supplicant to give to a benefactor, within the terms the role lays down? The question is not rhetorical. It marks a feature of these positions that later sections will need: the role's own grammar may leave no slot for the return whose absence, on the account to come, is what lets a posture harden. That some of the people most called upon to help should be among those most liable to coldness and arrogance is, in this light, less a puzzle of character than a feature of the positions they hold.

4 THE DIMENSIONS AND THE PRIORITY OF RELATION

The framework within which the postures are sorted takes being to be at once generative and relational, and the taxonomy to follow uses these two as its axes. Before they can serve as axes their relation to one another must be fixed, for on it the whole classification turns; and fixing it takes care, since the natural ways of putting it import more than the framework will allow.

4.1 *Why Relation Is Prior, and in What Sense*

One might be tempted to call relation the substrate and generativity what runs upon it, so that there is first a relation and then, within it, the production of value. This says too much. It installs relation as a thing that exists first, with generativity as its later tenant, and so smuggles in exactly the kind of absolute ground the framework declines to posit. The framework does not hold that relation is the stuff of which being is made, with generativity a subsequent activity of that stuff. Neither does it make the two co-equal, each as originary as the other, for that would leave the taxonomy with two independent axes and no account of how a degradation in one bears on the other.

The priority relation holds is of a third kind, and naming it precisely is the point of this

subsection. Relation is prior as a *condition of possibility*. Its priority is that of what makes something possible over the thing so made, and it remains, in occurrence, entangled with what it makes possible. What relation makes possible is the positing of difference and of constraint. A difference is always a difference *with respect to* something; it does not stand alone, and to have differences at all is already to stand in relation. Constraint, in turn, is what difference does to a field of possibility: it cuts the field, ruling some things in and others out. And it is only upon a field of possibility so cut, so structured by posited difference and constraint, that there can be such a thing as structural evolution, a capacity of the system to become, in whole or in part, otherwise than it is. That capacity, the possibility of structural, or partial-structural, evolution upon a relationally structured field, is what the framework means by generativity.

So the chain runs: relation makes possible the positing of difference and constraint; upon difference and constraint there emerges the possibility of structural evolution; and that possibility is generativity. Generativity presupposes relation, then, for a definite reason. Relation supplies the *structure of the possibility-space* within which alone anything could evolve, and supplies it without being the material out of which generation is made. This is the sense in which the priority is transcendental: relation is the condition under which generativity is possible, and is by that very role kept from being a ground lying beneath it.

Two consequences must be held together, and they do not conflict. The priority is genuine: absent the relational structuring of possibility there is no room for generation, and in that precise sense relation comes first. And generativity can, in occurrence, reshape relation, since a particular course of generation alters the particular relation it occurs in; the transcendental priority of relation survives this genetic feedback, because any such reshaping still takes place within the possibility-space relation affords. Relation is prior in possibility; generativity may feed back in occurrence. There is no question here of which came first in time, and none is asked.

Premise (entered as open). *Relationality holds a transcendental priority over generativity: it is the condition under which difference and constraint can be posited, and only upon these does the possibility of structural evolution, which is generativity, emerge. This priority is one of possibility, held apart from substance and from temporal precedence, and it leaves room for generativity's reshaping of relation in occurrence. The premise is used here to build the taxonomy; it is offered without claim of demonstration, and the account that rests on it stands or falls with it.*

4.2 Degeneration and the Contraction of Possibility

The priority just fixed yields a definition of what it is for a relation to degrade. If generativity is the possibility of structural evolution upon a relationally structured field, then degeneration is

the contraction of that possibility: the closing of the field, the narrowing of the room in which the system could become otherwise. A relation degrades, on this definition, when the space of its possible changes shrinks, when what could have become various becomes fixed; the mere fact of change is no degradation, for change is what a living relation does.

This definition has a degree built into it, for the qualifier “structural or partial-structural” was deliberate. The possibility-space need not close all at once or entirely; a part of it may narrow while the rest stays open. Degeneration is accordingly a magnitude and not a single event, and the taxonomy to follow will exploit this. Coldness and arrogance are distinguished as contractions of the possibility-space along different dimensions, reached by different routes, and the difference between them is one of dimension and route, not of the presence or absence of degradation.

5 THE TAXONOMY OF RELATIONAL DEGRADATION

With the two dimensions fixed and degeneration defined as the contraction of possibility, the postures can be sorted. The claim of this section is that coldness and arrogance are degradations that fall on different dimensions, in place of one mechanism seen twice, and that each, moreover, admits more than one path, so that the mechanisms are plural.

5.1 *The Two Dimensions and Their Axes*

Two questions can be asked of any relation, and they are distinct. The first is generative: is the relation still producing, does structural evolution still occur upon it, or has the field gone still? The second is relational: does the relation still posit and return difference, does value and regard still flow both ways and reverse, or has the direction locked? The first axis runs from a relation that generates to one that has ceased to; the second from a relation whose difference is live and returned to one whose difference has been fixed one-way. Because relation holds the transcendental priority set out in §4, the two axes are asymmetric, and their asymmetry is what will separate the postures.

5.2 *Arrogance and the Relational Dimension*

Take arrogance first. What has degraded in it is the relational dimension. The relation of chronic giving, held long, may cease to have its direction returned: the giver gives and is not, in turn, given to; the difference between the positions, once posited afresh each time the roles reversed, is now posited once and held. The physician who is never, or too rarely, instructed by a patient, corrected downward from the seat of authority, returned to the position of one who receives, inhabits a relation in which difference has stopped circulating and lies fixed in a single orientation. This is a degradation of the relational axis. The relation may still produce,

and the physician may be curing as effectively as ever; what has failed is the return, so that what the relation produces no longer comes back, and the difference it posits has locked.

Upon this relational lock the generative possibility above it contracts, and here the transcendental priority does its work. Because generativity emerges only upon posited-and-returned difference, a difference that has ceased to circulate can no longer support genuine structural evolution; what generation continues is more and more the reproduction of the fixed position, an idling that confirms the giver in place while opening nothing new. The relational degradation propagates upward into a generative hollowing, as the priority says it must. And it is upon this hollowed, locked configuration that the occupant's experience becomes uniform, always above, never returned, and that uniformity lies open to being misread as a property of the self. Arrogance is the name of that misreading, and its root is the relational lock.

5.3 Coldness and the Generative Dimension

One class of coldness falls on the other axis. Here the relation still posits and returns difference; the cold physician may still recognize the patient as an other with a claim, may still, in principle, be reached; and yet no structural evolution occurs upon the relation, nothing new is generated, the field has gone still. This is degradation of the generative dimension with the relational dimension still standing. Its phenomenology is exhaustion in place of height: the sentence it speaks is "I have nothing to give," which is far from "I am above you," and its bearing is the withdrawal of one who is depleted, at a distance from the survey of one who is elevated. The relation is intact as a relation; what has failed is generation upon it.

The transcendental priority predicts that this degradation need not propagate the way arrogance's does. Because generativity presupposes relation while relation does not presuppose generativity, the stilling of generation leaves the relational structure beneath it standing: the difference is still posited, the other is still an other, and the relation stays in principle recoverable should generation resume. This is why one class of coldness can lift where arrogance holds fast: the depleted giver who is replenished may simply resume, the relational ground having never been lost. The asymmetry of the two axes, which is the asymmetry of the transcendental priority, is exactly what tells the two postures apart.

Conjecture 1 (the taxonomic split). *Coldness and arrogance may be degradations on different dimensions, in place of one mechanism seen twice: arrogance may arise where the relational dimension degrades, returned difference locking and the generative possibility above it hollowing into the reproduction of a fixed position; one class of coldness may arise where the generative dimension degrades, generation stilling while the relational structure stands. The asymmetry between them follows the transcendental priority of relation: relational degradation propagates upward into generative hollowing, while generative degradation may leave the relation beneath it standing.*

5.4 *Why the Mechanisms Are Plural*

The two axes locate the postures without exhausting them, for a posture is an end-state, and an end-state on one axis may be reached by more than one route. The reason lies in a fact set aside in §4: though relation holds transcendental priority, the two dimensions mutually constitute one another *in occurrence*. A particular relation is sustained partly by what it generates, and a particular course of generation reshapes the relation it runs in. This occurrent entanglement means a degradation begun on one axis will, through feedback, draw on the other.

Two consequences follow. The first is that degradation, once begun, tends to deepen and to become stable, for the axes clamp one another: a relational lock hollows generation, and a hollowed generation, having nothing new to circulate, cannot rebuild the returned difference that would unlock the relation, a closed loop that neither side can easily open from within. Coldness and arrogance are in this sense self-holding, and seldom transient. The second consequence is that a single end-state is reachable by distinct paths. Arrogance may be entered from the relational axis, the direction locking first and generation hollowing after; or it may be entered from the generative axis, an exhaustion coming first, upon which the subject sustains a one-way bearing by overdrawing the old position in place of generating anew. The terminus is the same posture; the path differs. The mechanisms are accordingly plural, and a taxonomy of these postures must chart paths as well as positions, a task this paper opens and leaves for later work to complete.

Conjecture 2 (multiplicity of path). *Because the two dimensions mutually constitute one another in occurrence, a degradation begun on either axis draws on the other, so that a single posture is reachable by more than one path and the axes clamp one another into a self-holding state. The mechanism of a posture is therefore plural, and its taxonomy must distinguish paths of entry as well as dimensions of degradation.*

6 THE OSSIFICATION OF A RELATIONAL POSITION

The taxonomy locates arrogance on the relational dimension and coldness, in one class, on the generative one. This section develops the relational degradation that yields arrogance, since it is there that a further and more contestable step is taken: the passage from a locked position to a supposed essence. The step is offered as a candidate mechanism, held short of any claim to be the established truth of arrogance.

Consider what a locked direction furnishes the subject as experience. When giving runs one way without return, the subject meets, day upon day, a single relational fact: I am above. Where the direction reverses, no such constant is available, for the subject is by turns above and below, and the alternation forbids the inference that either position is simply what the subject

is. The relational lock removes the alternation and leaves a uniform experience of elevation, repeated until it takes on the seeming of a standing fact; and a standing fact about a person is read, too readily, as a fact about what the person is. *I am always above* becomes, by a short and unforced step, *I am, by nature, above*. This conversion of a constant relational position into a supposed property of its occupant is here called ontologization, and it is proposed as the mechanism by which a relational lock becomes the posture of arrogance.

So described, the passage from role to essence needs no decision and runs in one direction. It is sedimented in place of chosen: competence, a fact; then authority, a conferred and relational role; then a supposed higher worth, in which the standing has come loose from the relation that produced it and been read as a property of the person. Each phase is the natural reading of an experience the lock has made uniform, and the uniformity supplies the pressure that carries the reading onward. Arrogance, on this account, is a mistranslation the configuration invites, in place of an attitude the subject adopts.

Conjecture 3 (ontologization, offered as candidate). *The relational lock may become arrogance by ontologization: the direction of giving locks, the subject's experience of standing above is made constant, and that constancy is misread as a property of the person, in place of a feature of the relation, competence passing through authority into a supposed essence. This is proposed as a candidate mechanism for the relational branch of the taxonomy, to be tested against the projections of §8, and it is held short of any claim to be the truth of arrogance.*

A consequence for identity follows, and is entered as conjecture. If arrogance is the misreading of a locked position as an essence, the "essence" so produced is a residue the relation's degradation deposited, and not a property the subject held before the relation and expressed within it. Identity, in this instance, has the form of a sediment, what is left when a relation's returned difference locks and its position is left to settle. The suggestion is confined to this identity, the arrogant one, and does not extend to all identity; it is consonant with a framework positing nothing prior to relation.

7 THE SOURCING OF CONFIRMATION

Some who occupy a high position for long degrade, and some do not, and answering why both strengthens the account and guards it against a moral misreading. Some who are chronically deferred to stay clear of the posture: the eminent practitioner who each day feels instructed by a student, corrected by a colleague, taught something by the problem or the patient before them. If the relational lock produced arrogance mechanically, these would ossify, and they do not. What holds them open?

The tempting answer is virtue, and it must be set aside, for the framework is not entitled to it and the account does not need it. The occupant who stays clear of hardening is, so far as this analysis can say, the differently supplied one, and no better a person. A subject in a high position stands in need of confirmation, some source that returns to it a sense of its standing, and the question is whence that confirmation is drawn. The hardening subject can draw it only from below, from the deference of those it gives to, the sole source a locked relation leaves open. The subject that stays open draws confirmation elsewhere: from the work, from being corrected, from the recurring experience of being wrong and coming to see it. So supplied, it has no need to extract its standing from the deference beneath it. And here is the decisive point: to be corrected, instructed, shown wrong just *is* to have the direction of the relation returned, which is the very thing the relational lock forecloses. The occupant whose confirmation is anchored in sources that return it to the receiving position is, by that fact, in a relation whose difference still circulates, and so has no constant elevation to be misread.

This reframes the difference between the arrogant and the humble occupant without recourse to character. What separates them is the sourcing of confirmation: for the one, downward-only, and exposed to the lock; for the other, anchored in what keeps returning the subject to the position of one who receives, and so kept unlocked. The humble occupant holds off the descent by no force of will; the descent is unavailable to a subject whose relation still returns. This is also the guardrail made exact. To attribute arrogance to configuration in place of vice locates it without excusing it, and the location is a relation's, and not a soul's.

Conjecture 4 (sourcing, held apart from virtue). *Whether an occupant of a lasting high position degrades may turn on the sourcing of confirmation in place of character: the subject that can draw confirmation only from the deference below it is exposed to the lock, while the subject whose confirmation is anchored in sources that return it to the receiving position, the work, correction, the experience of being wrong, is by that fact in a relation whose difference still circulates, and so is held open. The difference between the arrogant and the humble is one of relational configuration, held apart from virtue.*

8 THE EXISTING ACCOUNTS AND THE PROJECTION TEST

The structure proposed here would be idle if it stood apart from what has already been said about these postures. If it has any purchase, the established accounts should be recoverable as its projections, as what the structure looks like when one or more of its dimensions is dropped from view. This section asks, of six such accounts, whether the recovery goes through. The exercise is one of exposure in place of homage: each projection is a place at which the structure makes a checkable commitment, and a projection that fails to go through is a point at which

the structure is shown to be wrong. The accounts are taken in turn, and in each the mapping is stated together with the point at which it might break.

8.1 *Recognition*

The Hegelian account of recognition, and its social elaboration, holds that the master's predicament is that the recognition he commands issues from the very subordinate he has demeaned, and so is worthless to him. Mapped onto the present structure, this is the projection onto the confirmation dimension of §7: the subject whose regard is sourced only downward. The recovery is close, and its closeness is a point in the structure's favor. The point at which it might break must equally be marked. Recognition, in the Hegelian telling, is answered by *symmetry*, by mutual recognition between equals; the present structure is answered instead by *return*, by the reversal of a difference that stays a difference. If these are the same demand, the projection holds. If symmetry and return come apart, as they do should a relation return difference without equalizing it, in the way the healthy asymmetry of teaching or of care appears to, then the structure and the recognition account diverge, and the divergence exposes a distinction the present account owes and has not fully paid: that between symmetry and return.

8.2 *Disposition*

The account of embodied disposition, of a durable hexis laid down by a position and worn thereafter as second nature, recovers the sedimentation of §6: the constant experience settling into a bearing. The projection is onto the mechanism of ontologization, and it goes through as far as the settling. Its breaking point concerns the source of what settles. In the disposition account the bearing is laid down by a *social position* exogenous to the relation, by where one stands in a field. In the present structure it is laid down by a lock *endogenous* to the relation, by the ceasing of returned difference within it. If the two sources coincide, the projection holds, and the present account is a dynamical refinement of the dispositional one, specifying when the disposition sets. If they come apart, so that positions produce dispositions with no reference to whether difference returns within the relation, the accounts part, and the parting bears directly on the open question of what locks the direction.

8.3 *Internalized Oppression*

The account of internalized oppression describes a subject brought to read a diminished position as its own nature, to author, from within, a lowering symbol of itself. This is the taxonomy's other corner: a relational degradation read as essence, downward and from without, where arrogance is upward and from within. The projection tests the reach of the ontologization mechanism across the sign. If the diminished self-reading and the elevated one are recognizably one mechanism running in opposite directions, the structure gains a unification

it did not assume. If they prove to differ in kind as well as in direction, then the corner does not belong to the same taxonomy, and the structure is narrower than proposed. The test is left genuinely open here, which is the honest state of it.

8.4 *The Gaze*

The psychoanalysis of the gaze holds that the subject is constituted under the regard of an other, and cannot simply forgo that regard. This recovers the confirmation dimension at its structural root: it says why the sourcing of regard should be constitutive at all, why a subject cannot merely walk away from the deference beneath it. The projection is onto the same dimension as the recognition account, one layer deeper, at the level of what makes regard necessary in place of what makes it worthless. Its breaking point: if the constitutive gaze requires no return, being, in its usual telling, a structural relation to an other that is no exchange, then the present structure's insistence on *returned* difference may import an economy of exchange the gaze does not have, and over-relationalize what is meant to stay structural. The projection would then hold for the fact of the gaze and fail for its return, and mark a place where the present account has assumed more traffic than the phenomenon carries.

8.5 *Narcissism*

The clinical account of narcissism, particularly the account on which the self depends, for its cohesion, on a continuing supply of confirming regard from others taken as extensions of itself, recovers the present structure as its relational generating-condition. Mapped on, the failure of returned difference is the drying of that supply from its proper sources, upon which the self comes to draw confirmation from whatever regard it can command. The projection would place the present account beneath the clinical one, supplying the relational conditions under which the described dependence arises. Here lies the sharpest breaking point in the paper. If narcissism can arise with no relational asymmetry at all, from an intra-psychic deficit owing nothing to any degraded relation, then the relational generating-condition is not necessary, and arrogance of this kind can occur without the degradation the structure makes central. The structure does not forbid this; it is exposed exactly here, and the case of arrogance without relational degradation, should it be well established, would fix a boundary the structure must respect or fall to.

8.6 *Extraction*

The political economy of extraction describes value drawn continuously in one direction, taken and never returned. Mapped onto the subject, this is the relational lock of §5 seen as an economy: the one-way flow whose subjective face is the reading of the upstream position as a worth.

Arrogance, on this projection, is the extractive relation worn as a posture. The projection connects the present account to a large body of analysis, and for the relational branch it is natural. Its breaking point concerns whether the posture is a *necessary* face of the flow. If extraction can run in a purely institutional, unsubjectivized form, value taken one-way with no occupant who reads the taking as a personal height, then the flow permits the posture without entailing it, and the structure must retreat from claiming that the flow produces the posture to claiming only that it permits it. That retreat is likely the correct one, and stating it is part of holding the structure to its weakest defensible form.

Conjecture 5 (the structure as candidate). *The structure is offered as a candidate, and not as the truth of these postures, whose warrant is the recoverability of existing accounts as its projections: recognition and the gaze onto the confirmation dimension, disposition onto ontologization, internalized oppression onto the taxonomy's opposite corner, narcissism onto the relational generating-condition, extraction onto the relational lock. Each projection is a checkable commitment, and each carries a point of possible failure, symmetry against return, exogenous against endogenous source, difference in kind across the sign, gaze without return, narcissism without asymmetry, extraction without subjectivation, at which the structure would be shown wrong. Its standing is exactly as good as these mappings prove to be.*

9 THE GUARDING OF AUTHORITY AND THE REACH OF THE TAXONOMY

The taxonomy so far sorts two postures along two dimensions and tests the sorting against existing accounts. This section marks where the sorting runs out. It does so by following a case the running instance already contained and the account has until now passed over, and by letting that case open a second coordinate the two dimensions do not supply. The section ends by stating, as plainly as it can, what the taxonomy does not reach.

9.1 *The Defensive Lock of the High Position*

The observation that opened this inquiry included a phrase the analysis has so far dropped. The physicians who met the visitor with coldness or height seemed also to be guarding something, to be holding a position and its resources. That guarding does not fit the coldness of §5, which was the coldness of depletion, the withdrawal of one who has nothing left to give. What the high position guards against is different. Here the withdrawal protects an authority, and the thing it fends off is the return itself: to be questioned by the one who has come for help, to be asked to justify a judgment to a subordinate, is felt as a threat to the standing from which the judgment issues. The lock, in this case, is no residue of an exhausted generosity. It is deployed, and deployed to keep the position intact.

This defensive lock differs from the trauma of a depleted subject, which closes to protect itself and pays the cost inward. The high position closes to protect its authority and passes the cost outward, onto the one whose return is refused. And the lock stands in a particular relation to arrogance. Where arrogance has already set, the defensive lock is what maintains it, since any genuine return, any moment of being instructed or corrected by one below, would loosen the very fixity that ossification depends on. Guarding and arrogance are in this sense one posture together with its self-defense, and not two separate things.

What this case exposes is a direction of causation the two dimensions were not built to carry. In §5 degradation came first and the posture followed: the direction locked, and arrogance settled upon the lock. Here the order can run the other way. A subject bent on guarding its authority may lock the return deliberately, and the relational degradation is then the product of the guarding, not its antecedent. The motive manufactures the degradation. A taxonomy that treats degradation as the independent term and posture as what follows cannot, by itself, hold a case in which the posture's motive drives the degradation. The case asks for a further coordinate, one that registers what the subject is doing in the degradation, whether withdrawing from it or wielding it, in place of which dimension has degraded.

9.2 *Why Symbolic Authority Guards Itself*

To call the guarded thing an "authority" and stop there would name the case without explaining it. Why should a position of authority need guarding at all, such that a return becomes a threat? Two features of symbolic authority, drawn from psychoanalytic accounts of it, supply the reason, and both point the same way.

The first is that symbolic authority has no ground of its own. It is conferred by a symbolic order that rests, at bottom, on no ultimate guarantor; the authority a title carries is lent by the network of recognitions that install it, and is in that sense borrowed and revocable, standing on an empty place. An authority so constituted has to be continually enacted to persist, for it owns nothing beneath the enactment to fall back on. A return threatens it precisely because a return calls the enactment to account, asks it to explain and to justify, and an authority that must justify itself has already descended from the position of one whose word is taken to that of one whose word is weighed. The lock that refuses the return preserves the appearance that no justification is owed, which is the appearance on which a groundless authority subsists.

The second is that such authority runs on a presumption lodged in the other. The one who comes for help, for judgment, for healing, approaches the physician or the judge as one presumed to know, and the authority operates through that presumption far more than through any knowledge that might answer to it. The presumption is delicate. To be questioned closely by a subordinate, and to be found not to know, punctures it directly, and with it the position it sustains. The defensive lock guards this presumption from puncture: to decline the concrete exchange is to keep from view the moment at which the one presumed to know might

be shown not to.

Both features describe something true of authority as such, and this is the point at which the case must be handled with care. If every symbolic authority stands on an empty place and runs on a presumption, then every symbolic authority requires maintenance, and maintenance cannot itself be the degradation. The healthy exercise of authority maintains its position too; a good teacher and a good judge are also presumed to know, and do not cease to hold their office each time they are questioned. What separates them from the defensive lock is the point on which this whole account has turned. The healthy authority maintains itself while admitting the return: it can be questioned, corrected, even bested, and its authority is re-granted afterward in place of destroyed. The defensive lock maintains itself by refusing the return, because it can no longer survive being questioned. The criterion is the familiar one. What matters is whether the maintenance proceeds by closing the return or by admitting it; the mere fact of maintenance settles nothing, since authority is always maintained.

9.3 *The Registers of Damage*

The defensive lock and the ossification of §6 both belong to the relational dimension, and they are not the same; what tells them apart is the register of the subject in which the damage falls, in place of the dimension that has degraded. Three such registers can be distinguished, and they furnish a second coordinate alongside the first. Where the first coordinate asks which dimension has degraded, the generative or the relational, this second asks which register the degradation touches: the symbolic, the imaginary, or the real.

The guarding of authority falls in the symbolic. What the defensive lock protects is a position in the order of recognitions, a standing conferred by title and office, and the threat it wards off is a threat to that conferred standing. The ossified arrogance of §6 falls, by contrast, in the imaginary. What ontologization does is take an image the relation has returned, the image of oneself as always above, and mistake it for one's being; this misrecognition of an image as an essence is the work of the register in which the self forms by identifying with its reflection. The two are distinct, and yet they are found together, for the durable arrogance met in the world is seldom a private fantasy of superiority. It is an imaginary misrecognition stabilized by a symbolic authority, the reflected image of height held in place by a conferred standing that vouches for it. Arrogance of the enduring kind is a composite of the two registers; the guarding coldness is a defense mounted in one of them.

The third register, the real, marks the place the taxonomy reaches least. If there is a coldness that answers to it, the trauma-defense named below is the candidate, the closing of a subject upon an encounter it cannot bring into speech. The paper has little to say of this register beyond marking that it is there and largely empty. That emptiness is not a decoration. It is one of the boundaries the next subsection must draw.

9.4 *What the Taxonomy Does Not Reach*

A taxonomy earns trust by stating where it fails, and this one fails in three ways that can be named exactly. It is not exhaustive, not exclusive, and not complete in the register it has just opened.

It is not exhaustive because kinds of coldness fall outside the dimension it sorts. The coldness this paper placed on the generative axis was the coldness of depletion, and its own phrasing, a class of coldness, conceded from the first that others were left unsorted. Two press hardest. There is the defensive coldness of trauma, the closing of a subject to protect itself from an encounter it cannot absorb, which performs an active severing on the relational side in place of a stilling of generation, and which the account can locate only by adding the register of the real and the coordinate of response that §9 was driven to. And there is strategic coldness, the coldness of one who withholds response as a deliberate instrument, the silent treatment wielded to isolate or to compel. This last lies outside the taxonomy altogether, for the taxonomy sorts degradations, failures of a relation to go on generating or returning, and strategic coldness is a deed in place of a failure: the relation is not broken, it is used. A classification of degradations cannot hold an action, and the honest place for strategic coldness is outside its border.

It is not exclusive because the two dimensions leave a quadrant it cannot divide. A relation may fail on both axes at once, neither generating nor returning, and the subject in such a relation may present as cold or as arrogant with nothing in the two coordinates to say which. The both-degraded case is real, and the taxonomy has no criterion internal to it that assigns a posture to one name or the other. Where the axes fall silent, so does the sorting.

And it is not complete in the register-coordinate it has introduced, for that coordinate is unevenly filled. The symbolic and the imaginary have clear residents; the real has, at most, one uncertain candidate. A second coordinate that leaves a third of its range empty is a beginning of an analysis, not the whole of one. The right posture toward these empty and undivided cells is to leave them so, since to fill them by fiat would purchase completeness at the cost of the honesty that is the only thing recommending the scheme.

What all three failures share is a lesson about the taxonomy's standing. It is a local instrument. It gives a mechanism-distinction for the postures it can place, the depletion-coldness and the ossification-arrogance that fall cleanly on its two dimensions, and it marks its own edges: the actions it cannot classify because they are not degradations, the quadrant it cannot divide, the register it has opened and mostly not filled. Completeness is not claimed for it. Completeness is named as something a further inquiry would have to establish, and this paper does not.

Conjecture 6 (the local reach of the taxonomy). *The taxonomy may be local in place of complete. A second coordinate, the register of the subject in which damage falls, distin-*

guishes the symbolic guarding of authority from the imaginary misrecognition of ossified arrogance, and suggests that enduring arrogance is a composite of the two; a third register, the real, is marked and left largely empty. Certain postures fall outside the scheme: strategic coldness, which is a deed and not a degradation; the trauma-defense, which asks for the register of the real; and the both-degraded quadrant, which the two dimensions cannot divide. The scheme is offered for what it can place, with its edges named, and with no claim to exhaust the postures it sorts.

10 THE UNSETTLED TRIGGER AND THE LIMITS OF THE ACCOUNT

The account has made the lock of returned difference the hinge of arrogance and the stilling of generation the hinge of coldness, and has sorted the two postures onto different dimensions accordingly. It has yet to say why, in a given case, the direction locks or the generation stills, and honesty asks that this be posed openly, for the taxonomy classifies degradations whose trigger it does not supply.

At least three candidates present themselves, and the account does not adjudicate. The lock may be imposed from without, by a configuration that strips away the occasion for return, the sheer throughput of a setting that leaves no interval in which the one below could become, even briefly, the one who gives. It may be drawn from within, by a quiet declining of return, the labor of being taught and corrected being real labor a subject may cease to undertake; and in the sharper form given it in §9, the return may be locked on purpose, to guard an authority the return would threaten. Or it may follow a prior drying of confirmation's other sources, so that the narrowing of regard precedes the lock and brings it on, in place of following from it. These candidates are not exclusive, and the paths of §5 suggest a given case may combine them. Which locks the direction, under what conditions, is the question the paper leaves open, and on which its central conjectures finally depend.

The limits are of a piece with this. The empirical basis is a small set of observations from a single kind of position, and the running instance carries confounds the account does not displace: the physician's coldness admits explanations of volume, fatigue, and the defense against distress, which the relational reading does not overturn, and the claim entered was only that these do not exhaust the phenomenon, and never that the relational structure is its sole cause. The projections of §8 are offered as tests, and several are left explicitly unsettled; the structure is meant to be held only as firmly as they come to warrant. And the distinction on which the taxonomy turns, between a difference returned and a difference locked, awaits an operational form that would let a given relation be assigned to one side by something firmer than the reading offered here. Supplying that form, charting the paths of entry the mechanisms take, and settling the projections that here only hang, is the work this paper leaves open.

A note on method. No formal apparatus has been used, and the abstention is deliberate. The two dimensions could be written as coordinates, a degradation as motion along one of them, the mutual constitution of §5 as a coupling term, and a self-holding posture as an attractor of the coupled system into which the returning orbit has collapsed; the arrogant subject would then be a fixed point of a relation's own degenerated dynamics. The connection is real and may be worth developing. It is left undeveloped here, because the argument is a conjecture stated in prose, and to formalize a conjecture would lend it a rigor it has not earned. What is claimed is claimed in the prose, and claimed only as a candidate to be tested.

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