

GENERATIVE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMICS

AN APPLICATION OF THE GENERATIVE RELATIONAL BEING FRAMEWORK

Wanhong HUANG
huangwanhong.g.official@gmail.com

Abstract

Household economics, in its classical and its bargaining forms alike, takes the household as a system for allocating resources that already exist, resolving who holds what, who performs which role, and how income, time, and care are divided among members. This paper argues that allocation is not the first question a household poses, and that a prior and more fundamental one has gone largely unasked, namely how a household comes to generate value it did not already possess. It proposes a generative framework in which the household is understood as a system for sustaining and expanding the generative capacity of its members rather than as a pool of resources awaiting division. On this framework a household's central task divides into five moments arranged in a determinate order. It must first identify and remove the generative barriers, biological, psychological, relational, and institutional, that prevent value from arising at all. Only then does the co-creation of value between members become a live question, followed by the circulation of that value through the relationship and outward to the wider world, the prevention of its extraction by external structures that capture what a relation produces without returning to it, and finally the return of value to its creators, understood not as income alone but as the reproduction of the very capacity that generated it. The argument draws the household within a wider programme that grounds subjecthood, value, and political economy in relation rather than in the individual or the fixed origin, and closes by proposing the household as one instance, the smallest and most legible, of a generative relational system whose logic extends to teams, institutions, and forms of collective governance beyond the family.

Keywords: generative household economics; allocation; generativity; generative barriers; value circulation; extraction; generative relational being; household economics; political economy.

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1 INTRODUCTION: THE ALLOCATION PREMISE AND ITS LIMIT

The argument of this paper begins in a premise so familiar to household economics that it is rarely stated as a premise at all. From the classical treatment of the family as a unified decision-making unit, through the several bargaining models that replaced unity with negotiation between members holding separate preferences, to the sociological literature on the division of domestic labour, the household has been approached as a system in which resources already exist and the analytical task is to describe how they come to be divided. Who holds what income, who performs which task, how time is apportioned between paid work, domestic work, and leisure, and how bargaining power shifts the outcome of these divisions: these are the questions the discipline has developed the means to answer, and it has answered them with

genuine insight into efficiency, fairness, and the distribution of power within the family. The premise beneath all of these questions is that value is the prior term and allocation is the operation performed upon it. The household, on this premise, is a resource pool, a site of joint utility maximization, a locus of bargaining over a surplus whose existence is assumed rather than explained.

This premise has a consequence the discipline is not well placed to see, because the consequence appears at a level the premise does not reach. Households can divide labour with rough equity and still find both members exhausted. Time can be allocated with apparent efficiency and still fragment into a rhythm that produces nothing beyond its own repetition. A household that satisfies every criterion the allocation model supplies, fair division, efficient use of time, transparent bargaining, can nonetheless be a household in which neither member is able to create anything that did not already exist, in which the relationship itself generates nothing, and in which whatever creative capacity each member once possessed steadily diminishes. The allocation framework has no vocabulary for this condition, because its object of analysis begins only after the question of whether value can be generated at all has already been settled, one way or the other, prior to the framework's own beginning.

This paper proposes that the prior question be made the first question. It develops a generative framework for household economics in which the household's primary task is not the allocation of resources that already exist but the sustaining and expansion of the generative capacity of its members, the capacity, that is, of individuals and of the relation between them to bring into being value that would not otherwise exist. Allocation does not disappear from this account. It becomes a subordinate concern, an instrument in service of generativity rather than the analytical starting point from which everything else is derived. A household is not first a pool of resources that must be divided and only secondarily a site of creation. It is first a generative system, and the questions of division, role, and bargaining power are questions about how that system is best sustained.

The reordering this paper proposes yields a determinate sequence, a generative analysis sequence, that organizes the whole of what follows. A household must first identify and remove whatever obstructs the generative capacity of its members, conditions this paper calls generative barriers, spanning the biological, the psychological, the relational, and the institutional. Only once such barriers are reduced does the co-creation of value between members become a live possibility, the production of something, whether knowledge, care, art, a shared undertaking, or a next generation, that neither member would have produced alone. Value so created must then circulate rather than accumulate in a single place or stagnate at its point of origin, moving through the relationship and outward to whatever wider community the household touches. Circulation is vulnerable at every point to extraction, the capture of value produced within a relation by an external structure that does not return what it takes, and a generative household economics must therefore be able to identify where and how such capture occurs. The final and closing moment concerns the return of value to its creators, understood not narrowly as income but as whatever reproduces the very generative capacity that produced the value in the first place, time, recognition, rest, growth, and continued relational support among them.

This sequence inverts the priority the allocation model assumes. Where that model asks how what exists is to be divided, the generative model asks first how what does not yet exist is to be enabled, and only afterward how what has come to exist should circulate, resist capture, and return. The paper joins a wider programme that has, in earlier work, replaced the individual with a generative relational being and approached value and epistemology from a relational rather than an atomistic foundation. It carries that programme onto the terrain of the household, and closer still, onto the terrain of the most intimate and smallest-scale relation the

programme has yet addressed directly, arguing that the household is best understood not as a resource-allocating institution but as a generative relational system, the most legible instance of a logic that extends, as the paper's closing discussion argues, well beyond the family.

The paper proceeds as follows. It first sets out the allocation model in its classical and bargaining forms and shows the limit at which its questions stop reaching. It then develops the generative alternative, locating the household within the wider generative relational framework. It takes up in turn the four kinds of generative barrier and the conditions under which they are removed, the co-creation of value once barriers are reduced, the circulation of value through and beyond the household, the risk and detection of its extraction, and the conditions of its return to those who created it. It closes by generalizing the argument beyond the household, to teams, institutions, and the forms of collective life in which the same generative logic, on a larger and less legible scale, is equally at work.

2 THE HOUSEHOLD AS AN ALLOCATION SYSTEM

The classical treatment of the family in economic theory takes the household as a single decision-making unit, endowed with a joint utility function, allocating the time, income, and consumption of its members so as to maximize a shared objective [6]. On this treatment the household is, at bottom, a small firm, producing commodities such as meals, child-rearing, and comfort out of purchased goods and the time of its members, and the analytical task is to describe the efficient combination of these inputs given the relative prices each member's time commands in the labour market. Specialization follows from comparative advantage. The member whose time commands the higher wage specializes in market work, the member whose time commands the lower wage specializes in household production, and the household as a whole is better off than either member would be alone. The elegance of this account lies in showing that a division of labour that looks, from outside, like an unequal distribution of burdens can be derived, from inside the model, as a jointly rational outcome.

The unitary model was followed by a family of bargaining models that replaced its single utility function with the separate and possibly conflicting preferences of the members themselves [7, 8], and by the collective model that dispensed with any need for the household to reach a single consensus at all, requiring only that whatever it does turn out to lie on the Pareto frontier its members could jointly reach [9, 10]. On the bargaining approach, the division of resources, of time, of consumption, and of decision-making authority within the household is understood as the outcome of a negotiation whose terms are set by each member's fallback position, the utility each could secure outside the relationship, in divorce, in a return to the labour market, in an alternative household arrangement. A member with a stronger fallback position secures a larger share of the household's joint product. This extension corrected the unitary model's blindness to power and to conflict within the household, and gave economics its first systematic account of why household outcomes track the relative bargaining strength of members rather than only the household's aggregate efficiency.

Both traditions, for all that separates them, share an unexamined premise inherited from the marginalist foundation of economics itself. Robbins's definition of the discipline as the study of the allocation of scarce means among competing ends [11], and the ordinal reformulation of utility that followed it [12], together fix the object of economic analysis as a problem of allocation, the distribution of a given endowment of resources, time, and preference-satisfying capacity among alternative uses. The household, inheriting this foundation, becomes a resource pool subject to division. What differs between the unitary and bargaining traditions is the mechanism of division, joint maximization in one case, negotiation in the other, not the prior question

of whether value is a given quantity to be divided or a quantity that is itself produced by the relation that divides it. Sociological accounts of the division of domestic labour, whatever their departure from the formal apparatus of bargaining theory, generally inherit the same premise, treating household work as a quantity of burden to be apportioned rather than as one register within a wider question of what the relation as such makes possible.

The premise is not without its critics from within economics. The capability approach developed by Sen holds that what matters is not the level of resources a person commands but the range of beings and doings those resources allow a person to achieve, and insists that this range cannot be read off from an income figure or a bundle of goods [13]. This departure moves in the direction the present paper takes further, shifting attention from the resource itself to what a person or a relation is thereby enabled to become and to do. It stops short, however, of asking how the capability to act, to relate, and to create is itself generated or obstructed within the ongoing life of a relation, a question the capability framework leaves open rather than answers, and one this paper takes as the household's first question rather than a refinement upon its allocation problem.

The limit of the allocation premise becomes visible not in its formal elegance, which is considerable, but in what it cannot register as a failure. A household may divide time, income, and domestic labour with rough equity by every measure the bargaining literature supplies, and its members may nonetheless find themselves increasingly depleted, increasingly unable to bring anything new into being together, the relation itself producing less and less as its formally fair allocation continues unchanged. The allocation model records this as, at most, a preference shift or an exogenous shock to be absorbed by renegotiation. It has no term for generative exhaustion, for a relation whose capacity to create is diminishing even as its distribution of existing goods remains stable or improves, because its analytical apparatus begins from the assumption that value is available for division and does not ask whether that value continues to be produced at all. This is the gap the following section takes as its point of departure.

3 THE HOUSEHOLD AS A GENERATIVE SYSTEM

The alternative this paper develops does not propose a better allocation model. It proposes that allocation is not the household's first question. A household, on the view advanced here, is before anything else a system for sustaining and expanding the generative capacity of its members, the capacity of each person, and of the relation between them, to bring into being value that would not otherwise exist. Resources, roles, and the division of labour remain real concerns, but they are concerns that arise within an already generative system and are answerable to it, rather than concerns from which the system's existence is derived.

The shift this involves is the shift a wider programme has already made at the level of the subject and of the sign, and this paper carries it onto the terrain of the household. That programme has argued that the individual is not an antecedent unit that subsequently enters into relation, but is itself constituted within relation, so that relation is the more basic term and the individual a formation within it [1, 4]. It has argued correspondingly that the sign does not carry a value fixed in advance of its use, but expresses and is answerable to a relational value that is generated in the exchange the sign mediates [3]. The household is the terrain on which these two prior moves converge most directly, because it is the relation in which subjects are formed, in which the earliest and most consequential generative or non-generative patterns are laid down [4, 5], and in which the daily work of symbolic and material exchange between members either sustains or depletes the capacity each brings to it.

A generative capacity, as the term is used here, names the capacity of a person or of a rela-

tion to produce what did not previously exist, whether that product is a shared understanding, a form of care, a piece of knowledge, a child, a household itself as an ongoing project, or a contribution to a wider community. The capacity is relational rather than individual in its ground, in the sense that it is not simply summed from what each member separately possesses but arises from the quality of the relation between them, a claim continuous with the wider programme's treatment of value as arising within relation rather than residing in a thing [2]. Two people of equal individual talent and resource can constitute, together, a highly generative relation or a barely generative one, and the difference lies in the relation itself, in whether it is organized so that each member's presence calls forth capacities in the other that would not otherwise be exercised, or organized so that each member's presence depletes the other, exacting more than it returns.

Generative capacity. The capacity of a person, or of the relation between persons, to bring into being value, understood broadly as knowledge, care, meaning, or form of life, that would not have existed in the capacity's absence. Generative capacity is sustained or diminished by the ongoing conduct of a relation, and is not reducible to the sum of what each member individually possesses.

On this reading the household's central task divides into a determinate sequence rather than a single allocation problem. Before value can be co-created, whatever obstructs the generative capacity of either member must be identified and reduced, a task the following section takes up under the heading of generative barriers. Once barriers are reduced, the co-creation of value between members becomes a live question, worked out below in terms of what a relation can bring into being that neither member could alone. What is created must then be sustained through circulation rather than left to accumulate at a single point or dissipate at its origin, and circulation must be defended against extraction, the capture of relationally produced value by a structure external to the relation that does not return what it takes. The sequence closes on the return of value to its creators, a return understood as the reproduction of the very capacity from which the value arose, so that the cycle can begin again rather than exhaust itself in a single turn.

This sequence gives the household a different criterion of success than the allocation model supplies. The allocation model asks whether resources, roles, and burdens are divided fairly and efficiently. The generative model asks whether the generative capacity of each member, and of the relation they compose, is increasing or diminishing over the course of the relation's life. These questions are not opposed. A household organized to answer the second question well will typically also divide its resources with rough fairness, because generative capacity is depleted by resentment and by the unrecognized extraction of one member's labour by another. But the second question can be answered when the first cannot, since generative capacity is not finally measured by a ledger of who holds what, and the first question can be answered affirmatively in a household whose second answer is bleak, an equitable division that presides over the steady exhaustion of both members' capacity to create anything beyond the maintenance of the division itself. It is this second, prior question that the remainder of the paper develops.

4 REMOVING GENERATIVE BARRIERS

If a household's first task is the sustaining of generative capacity rather than the allocation of resources, its first practical question is not who should do what but what, in the present arrangement of the household's life, is preventing capacity from being exercised at all. This

paper terms any such condition a generative barrier.

Generative barrier. Any condition, internal or external to a member's own body and mind, or internal or external to the relation between members, that obstructs the capacity of a person or a relation to produce value that would not otherwise exist. A generative barrier is distinguished from an ordinary cost or constraint by its effect, which is not merely to raise the price of an activity but to foreclose the activity's generative outcome altogether.

Four registers of generative barrier can be distinguished, not because the boundaries between them are sharp, but because each names a different point at which generative capacity is characteristically obstructed and each accordingly calls for a different kind of remedy.

The first register is biological. Sleep deprivation, chronic fatigue, and poor nutrition degrade the physical substrate on which any exercise of capacity depends, a point long established in the sleep and health literature and one that requires no theoretical apparatus beyond the recognition that a depleted body cannot sustain the attention, patience, and energy that generative exchange requires [20]. A household in which one or both members are chronically underslept or underfed is a household in which the question of co-creation cannot yet arise, whatever its formal division of labour, because the members lack the somatic basis on which any relation, generative or otherwise, is conducted.

The second register is psychological. Chronic anxiety, unresolved grief, and the condition long described in the organizational literature as burnout narrow the range of a person's responsiveness, directing attention toward threat and depletion rather than toward the open-ended engagement that generative exchange requires [21]. A household member in a state of psychological depletion may perform every assigned task and still be unable to bring anything beyond the task's completion to the relation, because the capacity that would exceed mere task completion has been narrowed by the psychological condition itself.

The third register is relational, and is the register in which the household's own internal conduct, rather than a condition each member brings into it, becomes the barrier. Chronic distrust, the asymmetric extraction of emotional labour by one member from another, and the failure to recognize a member's contribution as contribution at all rather than as background condition, are relational barriers in this sense [18]. They differ from the biological and psychological registers in that no intervention upon either member individually resolves them. The barrier is a property of the pattern of exchange between members, and its remedy lies in the reorganization of that pattern rather than in the restoration of either member taken separately.

The fourth register is institutional, and names the barriers a household does not generate internally but inherits from the arrangements of the wider economy and society within which it is embedded. The scheduling of paid work, the availability and cost of childcare, and the invisibility of unpaid care labour within the national accounts that measure economic output are institutional barriers of this kind [16, 17]. A household can conduct its internal relations as generatively as it is able and still find its generative capacity obstructed by an institutional arrangement, a work schedule incompatible with the rhythms of care, a labour market that prices one member's time in a way that forecloses the other's participation, that lies beyond what the household's own internal reorganization can resolve.

The four registers are listed in an order that reflects, roughly, their proximity to the household's own internal control, from the biological, over which a household has considerable direct influence, to the institutional, over which it typically has very little. This is not a claim that the biological register is prior in importance. A household with abundant sleep and rest but poisoned by chronic relational distrust is not thereby generative, and a household with strong internal trust but embedded in an institutional arrangement that makes adequate rest struc-

turally unavailable to one of its members is not generative either. The claim is only that the first practical task, whatever register the barrier belongs to, is diagnostic rather than distributive. Before a household asks how its members' time and labour should be divided, it must ask what, across these four registers, is currently preventing either member's capacity from being exercised at all, since a distribution however fair cannot generate what a barrier forecloses.

The removal of generative barriers is not a preliminary to the household's real business, understood as the co-creation of value, the division of labour, or the pursuit of a shared project. It is itself the household's first business, because no subsequent stage in the sequence this paper develops, co-creation, circulation, protection against extraction, or return, can proceed while the capacity it presupposes remains obstructed.

5 CO-CREATION AND THE CIRCULATION OF VALUE

Once generative barriers are sufficiently reduced, a question can be posed that the allocation model has no place for, namely what a household's members can bring into being together that neither would bring into being alone. This is the question of co-creation, and it reorients the household's central product away from consumption and toward whatever new capacity, understanding, or form of life the relation generates.

The economics of the household has not been without resources for thinking in this direction. The concept of a relational good, a good that can be produced and enjoyed only jointly and that ceases to exist in the same form when produced or consumed by a single person acting alone, was developed within economics precisely to capture goods, friendship, trust, a shared understanding, that resist the standard treatment of goods as separable and individually appropriable [14, 15]. The relational goods literature supplies a formal vocabulary for something the present account treats as the household's central case rather than a special one. What a household of two members produces, on the generative reading, is very often exactly a relational good in this sense, a form of trust, a shared body of practical knowledge, a capacity in a child that neither parent's separate effort would have produced, that exists only as the joint output of the relation and cannot be decomposed into a sum of individual contributions.

The range of what may be co-created in this sense is broad and is not confined to what a market would recognize as production. It includes practical knowledge built through years of shared problem-solving, care extended to a child or to an aging relative that produces, in its recipient, a capacity for trust and attachment that the recipient could not have generated alone [16], a shared undertaking pursued outside the household's own walls, and the household's own continuation as a relation capable of further generativity, its own reproduction as a generative unit rather than merely as a legal or residential one. What unifies this range is not its content but its structure. In each case the relation between members is productive in a manner that division of an existing endowment cannot capture, because what is produced did not exist, in any form, prior to the relation's operation upon it.

Value once created does not remain static, and a generative household economics must attend to its circulation as closely as to its creation. A relational good produced within a household can circulate inward, strengthening the relation's own future capacity, or outward, contributing to a wider community, a professional field, or a public good beyond the household's boundary. Both directions matter, and a household whose generativity circulates only inward, however rich its internal life, forecloses the wider contribution the account's opening discussion of encounter and generative potential anticipates, while a household whose generativity is drawn entirely outward, with nothing returning to sustain the relation itself, courts the de-

pletion the following section addresses under the heading of extraction.

Circulation. The movement of value produced within a relation, first inward, sustaining and compounding the relation's own future generative capacity, and then outward, contributing to communities, institutions, and forms of collective life beyond the relation's own boundary. A generative system is distinguished from a merely productive one by whether what it produces circulates in this doubled sense or instead accumulates at a single point and stagnates there.

The criterion by which circulation is to be judged healthy rather than merely present is developed at greater length elsewhere in this programme under the formal heading of holonomy, the measure of whether a cycle returns to its starting point bearing a surplus generated from within its own operation, or instead returns empty, or returns only by an extraction practiced upon some point external to the cycle itself [2]. Applied to the household, the criterion asks whether the cycle of co-creation and circulation just described is self-sustaining, generating from the relation's own internal exchange a surplus that supports the relation's continuation, or whether its apparent surplus is in fact drawn from a depletion occurring elsewhere, most often, as the following section argues, from the unrecognized labour of one member by the other, or from the household's exposure to structures that capture its output without returning to it what sustains its capacity to produce.

6 EXTRACTION AND THE RETURN OF VALUE

Circulation is not automatically healthy merely because value moves. It can move in a pattern that resembles circulation while in fact draining the relation that produced it, a pattern this paper follows the wider programme in calling extraction, the capture of relationally produced value by a party or a structure that does not return to the relation what sustains its capacity to produce again.

The clearest case within the household itself is the long-documented asymmetry in unpaid care and domestic labour, disproportionately performed by women, that does not appear in conventional measures of economic output and is correspondingly treated, both by the market and often within the household's own accounting of itself, as though it generated no value at all [17, 16]. The concept of a second shift, developed to describe the unpaid labour that continues after paid work ends and that falls unevenly across household members, names one instance of this pattern with particular precision [18]. What the generative framework adds to this diagnosis, already well established in the literature on gendered domestic labour, is a structural account of why the pattern constitutes extraction rather than merely unequal distribution. The labour in question is generative in the full sense this paper has developed. It produces the capacities, the attachments, and the daily conditions on which the household's other forms of co-creation depend. When it is performed without recognition and without a return that sustains the capacity of the person performing it, rest, time of their own, growth, acknowledgement, the relation is drawing a surplus from a depletion that its own internal accounting does not register, precisely the structure the wider programme identifies as an extractive cycle rather than a generative one [2].

Extraction is not confined to the relation between household members. It occurs at the boundary between the household and the wider institutions it is embedded within. The platform economy's capture of data and attention generated by users without a return proportionate to the value extracted has been analyzed at length in the recent literature on surveillance

capitalism and platform capitalism [22, 23], and the household is a primary site at which this extraction occurs, since much of what a platform captures is generated within the intimate and domestic exchanges the household conducts. A parallel and longer-standing extraction occurs at the level of social reproduction more broadly, in the capture by capital of the caring labour that reproduces the workforce without a corresponding contribution to its cost, an extraction that recent work in feminist political economy has diagnosed as a standing contradiction of the capitalist economy rather than an incidental defect [19]. The household, on the generative account, sits at the point where both forms of extraction, internal to the relation and external to it, converge, and a generative household economics must be able to name both if it is to be of use.

Extraction. The capture of value generated within a relation by a party, internal or external to the relation, that does not return to the relation what sustains its capacity to generate again. Extraction is distinguished from a fair return by its effect on the cycle's continuation. A fair return sustains the capacity from which the value arose. Extraction depletes it, so that the cycle, however much value it appears to move, is drawing down a capital of capacity it does not replenish.

The final moment in the sequence this paper has developed, following the removal of barriers, co-creation, and circulation, is return, the reproduction within the relation of the very capacity that produced the value now circulating beyond it. Return should not be read narrowly as income, though income is one of its forms. It includes time returned to the member whose labour produced value for the other, recognition that names a contribution as contribution rather than treating it as background condition, the growth that follows from having one's efforts witnessed and valued, and the continued relational support that allows the cycle to begin again rather than exhaust itself in a single turn.

A household's generative sequence closes only where it also renews itself. Return is not an optional final courtesy extended after the household's real business is complete. It is the condition under which the sequence, barrier removal, co-creation, circulation, and the vigilance extraction requires, can repeat, since a capacity that is drawn upon and never replenished is a capacity that is eventually exhausted, whatever the relation's earlier generativity.

Return, so understood, closes the cycle this paper has traced, from the removal of barriers that make generativity possible, through the co-creation and circulation of what a relation produces, to the vigilance extraction requires and the return that allows the whole sequence to recommence. A household that performs every stage of this cycle well is not, on the account developed here, merely a well-managed household. It is a generative system in the fullest sense the term has been given, one whose value does not accumulate at a fixed point or drain into a structure that does not sustain it, but returns, transformed, to the capacity from which it arose.

7 THE HOUSEHOLD AS A GENERATIVE LENS

The argument has been developed at the scale of the household because the household is the smallest and most directly observable unit at which the generative sequence, barrier removal, co-creation, circulation, extraction, and return, can be traced in its entirety, and because the household is the relation in which subjects are themselves formed, so that its generative or extractive character has consequences that reach beyond the household's own boundary into the

formation of the persons who compose it [4]. But nothing in the sequence's structure confines it to the household, and the paper closes by proposing the household as an analytical lens rather than as the argument's final scale.

A team within an organization faces the same sequence in a different register. Its members' generative capacity is obstructed by the same four registers of barrier, biological exhaustion, psychological burnout, relational distrust, and institutional constraints on time and recognition, before any question of task allocation can be productively posed, a point that the organizational literature on burnout and psychological safety has approached from a different direction but has not, on the whole, integrated into a single account of value creation [21, 24]. A research laboratory, a community organization, and a firm each face the same question of whether what their members produce circulates so as to strengthen the unit's own future capacity and the wider field it serves, or is extracted by an institutional structure, metrics of output detached from the underlying capacity they are meant to track, incentive systems that reward individual capture rather than joint generation, that depletes the very capacity it draws upon.

The generalization is not a claim that households, teams, and institutions are identical in their internal organization. It is a claim that the sequence developed here, the priority of barrier removal, the location of value in what a relation generates rather than in what it is given to allocate, and the closing insistence that value must return to its source if the cycle is to continue, describes a structure common to any system whose output depends on the sustained generative capacity of the relations that compose it, whatever the scale at which that system operates. The household is proposed as the argument's starting point because it is the scale at which the sequence is least obscured by institutional complexity, not because it is the scale at which the sequence matters most.

A further implication follows for how encounter itself might be regarded. If the household's generativity depends less on the individual qualities each member brings to it than on the relation's own capacity, once its barriers are addressed, to generate what neither member possessed beforehand, then the value of an encounter between persons cannot be assessed in advance by an inventory of what each brings to it. It lies in a potential that the relation itself carries and that only the reduction of generative barriers can allow to be realized. This reframes the practical task that follows from any significant encounter, whether between partners, between collaborators, or between members of a community, away from the evaluation of what each party separately offers and toward the more exacting question of what, in the present arrangement of the relation, is preventing its shared capacity from being exercised at all.

8 CONCLUSION

The argument set out from a premise so familiar to household economics that it is rarely examined as a premise, that the household is a system for allocating resources, time, and roles that already exist, and has tried to show that a prior question precedes it, namely how a household comes to generate value it did not already possess. Allocation does not disappear from the account developed here. It becomes an instrument answerable to a more fundamental task, the sustaining and expansion of the generative capacity of a household's members, and the sequence through which that task is carried out gives the household's central concerns, the removal of generative barriers, the co-creation and circulation of value, the vigilance extraction requires, and the return that allows the cycle to recommence, a determinate order that the allocation model has no means of supplying.

The account does not close on a doctrine of household management, and its closing gesture, in keeping with the wider programme it continues, is not to install a new fixed formula in

place of the allocation model's own. It closes instead on the questions a generative household economics leaves open. There is the question of measure, of how generative capacity, which is relational rather than individually possessed, might be tracked or assessed by instruments built to record the division of a given endowment. There is the question of institution, of what arrangements of work, care provision, and public support would answer the household's generative sequence rather than obstruct it at the institutional register this paper has named, and of how such arrangements might be built within an economy still organized chiefly around allocation. There is the question of extraction's detection, of how a household or the researcher studying it is to distinguish a fair return from a depletion disguised as one, when the depletion in question, as the second shift and the broader literature on unpaid care labour make clear, has so often gone unnamed precisely because it does not appear in the accounts built to register value. And there is the question that stands behind the others, of what a household, and by extension any relation whose value lies in what it generates rather than in what it is given to divide, would become if its members took the reduction of generative barriers, rather than the negotiation of a fair share, as their first and standing task.

A household's first question is not how what it has should be divided, but how what it does not yet have might be generated, and its measure of success lies less in the fairness of its allocation than in whether the generative capacity of its members, and of the relation between them, continues to grow.

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