

Justice of Relational Becoming: Histories, Generative Rules, and Relational Transformation

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Abstract

Many theories of justice evaluate distributions, procedures, institutions, actions, capabilities, recognition, or social structures at a given time. Yet relations may also be ethically significant because of how they were formed, maintained, modified, exited, or removed, and because present actions can alter the conditions of future relational change. Two relations that appear similar at time t may therefore differ substantially in their histories, in the authority through which they were produced, and in the future possibilities they make available. This paper develops a preliminary Generative Relational account of this problem under the heading *justice of relational becoming*.

The framework widens the object of judgment from a present relational state to the history and transformation of that relation. It distinguishes relation formation, maintenance, modification, exit, removal, and replacement as analytically different sites of possible evaluation, and separates intended action, performed action, and generated relational effect. A central proposal concerns changes to a *generative rule*: the historically situated structure that helps determine how relations can subsequently change. Formally, an action may affect both a relational state R_t and a transition structure F_t . Justice may therefore need to examine not only an immediate change in state but also whether an intervention redistributes future capacities to form, revise, contest, or exit relations.

The account further distinguishes judgment of a relation from authority to transform it, and connects relational genealogy with effective alternatives, prospective consequences, retrospective reinterpretation, and repair. It does not treat generativity, openness, or revisability as overriding moral goods, and it does not propose a decision procedure that converts relational description into a uniquely correct judgment. Its contribution is methodological: to provide a temporal-generative scaffold for identifying when histories, lifecycle positions, generated effects, and changes in future transformability become relevant objects of justice. The aim is to complement rather than replace established distributive, procedural, structural, relational, transitional, and historical approaches to justice.

Keywords: relational justice; generative relational systems; relational becoming; historical dependence; generative rules; relational transformation; agency; exit; responsibility; re-cognizability

Discussion Paper Note

This paper develops a preliminary account of what may be called *justice of relational becoming*. Its starting concern is that a relation can be normatively significant not only because of its present configuration, but because of the history through which it was formed, the powers and procedures through which it is maintained, the alternatives available to its participants, the conditions under which it can be revised or exited, and the rules that shape its future transformation. A present relational state is therefore not always a sufficient object of justice. Two relations may appear similar at time t while differing substantially in genealogy, effective alternatives, authority structures, exit conditions, accumulated dependencies, and future possibilities of change.

The working title is *Justice of Relational Becoming: Histories, Generative Rules, and Relational Transformation*. The word “becoming” is preferred because the paper is not concerned only with deliberate intervention. It includes formation, stabilization, maintenance, modification, expansion, contraction, suspension, exit, removal, replacement, and the emergence of subsequent relations. The object is processual without assuming that every process is normatively significant or that every change should be encouraged.

The paper should remain preliminary and analytically modest. It does not propose a complete theory of justice, does not claim to supersede distributive, procedural, relational, structural, capability-based, republican, transitional, or historical approaches, and does not treat generativity as an overriding moral good. Its narrower task is to identify a temporal-generative object of judgment and to show why certain justice questions become difficult when relations, their histories, and the rules governing future relational change are themselves changing.

A minimal warning guiding the paper is that similarity of present state does not establish equivalence of justice assessment. Two relations may be similar under a specified comparison while still requiring different justice assessments because genealogy, maintenance, authority, effective alternatives, or future transformation conditions remain normatively relevant. This warning does not presuppose a universal justice functional, nor does it imply that every historical difference changes the correct judgment.

The object of analysis should therefore be temporally expanded. A relational inquiry may need to distinguish the history through which a relation was formed, its current structure, the procedures and powers through which it is maintained, the formal and effective alternatives available to participants, possibilities and costs of exit, intended transformations, actions actually performed, generated relational effects, long-horizon consequences, changes to the rules governing later transformation, and later reinterpretation under changed evidence or concepts. The paper should not claim that all of these dimensions matter equally under every theory of justice. The narrower contribution is to make them analytically separable rather than collapsing them into a single present-state judgment.

A relation should not be treated as a timeless edge connecting already constituted entities. Formation and maintenance are different normative objects. A relation can be acceptable in its present operation while having been produced through dispossession or coercion. A relation can be voluntarily formed while later becoming difficult to exit because of dependency, legal status, infrastructure, bodily vulnerability, informational asymmetry, or accumulated cost. Conversely, a relation can originate under constrained conditions and later become meaningfully transformed by the participants. The lifecycle language is therefore analytical rather than teleological. Formation, maintenance, modification, expansion, contraction, suspension, exit, removal, replacement, and later relation creation can overlap, recur, or become difficult to distinguish in practice.

Historical dependence requires particular care. Let $H_{\leq t}$ denote a relational history up to time t . The paper should not treat the history available to an evaluator as transparent access to an uninterpreted past. Where useful, it should distinguish the actual trajectory, preserved or recorded traces, and an interpreter-relative reconstruction. These are working distinctions rather than commitments to a naive realism about complete historical recovery. Present relations may encode prior privilege, dispossession, coercion, dependency, institutional commitments, or exclusions whose generating conditions are no longer immediately visible. A justice framework concerned only with the current state may therefore miss normative

features carried by the relation's genealogy.

One of the paper's central analytical distinctions should separate intended action, performed action, and generated relational effect. The intention of an actor is evidence about one dimension of agency. The action actually implemented is another object. The relation generated through that action can differ from both. A protective intervention may generate durable dependency. A formally temporary emergency arrangement may generate persistent authority. An anti-discrimination procedure may reduce one form of exclusion while centralizing interpretive power. Assistance may alter later exit conditions. A formally neutral rule may generate sharply unequal effective alternatives. The paper should resist hindsight moralism here. Generated effects can be unintended and unforeseeable, so justice of effect and responsibility for effect must remain analytically distinct.

The strongest Generative Relational candidate contribution concerns what this paper provisionally calls *generative rules*. Let R_t denote a relational configuration and let F_t denote a working representation of the historically situated structure governing relevant possibilities of subsequent relational change. Section 1 introduces a numbered formal mapping for actions that transform both the relational state and the relevant transformation structure. The mapping notation is used there because a formal transformation is being specified. The analysis should distinguish change in the relational state, ΔR_t , from change in the transformation structure, ΔF_t . A policy may improve an immediate condition while concentrating future authority. An intervention may protect a participant while making later exit dependent on the intervener. A reform may open new contestation channels while closing others. A temporary arrangement may alter who can initiate, terminate, interpret, or revise future relations. These changes in F_t are candidate objects of justice because they redistribute future capacities to form, alter, contest, maintain, or exit relations.

The paper must nevertheless reject a simple normative rule such as "maximize generativity," "maximize openness," or "maximize future options." Some relations justifiably restrict future conduct. Stable commitments can be valuable. Protective constraints can be necessary. Irreversible decisions can sometimes be justified. The claim is therefore analytical: transformations of generative rules can matter to justice. Whether a particular transformation is just requires further normative argument within the relevant theory and relational history.

This distinction permits the paper to examine cases in which the immediate state and the future transformation structure move in different normative directions. A present relation may appear improved while future authority becomes more concentrated. A short-term deterioration may accompany the creation of meaningful exit or contestation. The same present state may be sustained under radically different distributions of revision power. An institution may preserve a desirable outcome by making later correction nearly impossible. The paper should not collapse these cases into a scalar "generative justice" score. Their significance lies precisely in keeping present state and future transformation structure analytically distinguishable.

Authority over relational transformation is another central issue. Correctly judging a relation does not itself establish authority to transform it. This extends distinctions developed elsewhere among ethical intelligibility, standing, reason, obligation, permission, authority, and action. A participant may correctly identify domination, injury, or exclusion without possessing unilateral authority to reorganize the relation. Conversely, an institution may possess formal jurisdiction while lacking adequate interpretation, legitimacy, or relational standing. Authority itself can be historically generated, delegated, contested, limited, or transformed by the very action it authorizes.

The relation between formal and effective alternatives also requires explicit treatment. The paper distinguishes a participant's formal option space from the subset of options that are effectively accessible under the relevant material, institutional, informational, and relational conditions. A nominal option can be practically inaccessible because exercising it would require unavailable resources, impose catastrophic cost, trigger legal or social exclusion, depend on inaccessible information, or destroy relations necessary for continued life. Exit is therefore not simply a binary property of a relation. The justice of exit concerns the conditions under which withdrawal, refusal, renegotiation, or replacement becomes meaningful, affordable, safe, and non-destructive. At the same time, exit must not become a universal remedy. Some relations are constitutive, ecological, intergenerational, infrastructural, or otherwise impossible to

terminate cleanly.

The paper should distinguish several temporal standpoints of judgment without pretending that they constitute separate theories of justice. Genealogical evaluation asks how a relation was generated. Present evaluation concerns its current structure. Prospective evaluation examines the future relational possibilities being opened, narrowed, or redistributed. Realized-consequence evaluation concerns what an action actually generated. Retrospective reinterpretation concerns how a relation is later reconstructed under changed evidence, concepts, or interpretive manifolds. These standpoints can support different questions and can produce tensions rather than a single temporally unified verdict.

Retrospective reinterpretation must be separated from retrospective responsibility attribution. Later interpreters may possess concepts, evidence, legal categories, or normative resources unavailable to earlier actors. A past relation can become newly intelligible without implying that earlier participants should be judged as though those later resources had been fully available to them. Responsibility must remain sensitive to historically generated option spaces, available evidence, interpretive resources, role, power, foreseeability, and effective alternatives. This is an interface with a later paper on free will, option spaces, and relational responsibility; the present paper should not absorb that project in full.

Comparison itself is also historically and politically structured. Two relational histories will almost never be identical in full detail. Claims such as “treat like cases alike” therefore depend on a quotient or coarse-graining under which some differences are treated as relevant and others as negligible. The paper should repeatedly ask: equivalent modulo what, for which purpose, and under whose authority? The justice question is not only whether two cases receive the same treatment after classification, but whether the comparison erased formation histories, path dependence, unequal exit, or changes in transformation authority that should have remained visible.

The paper should also examine future relational regions without converting them into a universal maximization principle. Present action can affect which relations remain formable, who can initiate or refuse them, what later revision costs become, whether alternative institutional pathways survive, whether future contestation remains possible, and whether records and interpretive resources remain available for later re-cognition. These effects can be normatively relevant under many theories of justice. Their relevance does not imply that the largest or most open future option space is always preferable.

Repair should likewise be treated as more than restoration of a previous state. The previous state may itself have been unjust, may no longer be available, or may no longer be meaningful to the affected participants. Repair can involve restoration, compensation, present structural transformation, alteration of future generative rules, creation of alternative relations, or preservation of future revision and re-cognition. The expression “re-generation” may be useful only if defined carefully. It should never imply that every damaged relation ought to be recreated.

The paper’s candidate contributions should remain narrow. First, justice of a relation may require a history-sensitive object rather than evaluation of present state alone. Second, intention, action, and generated relational effect should be treated as analytically distinct normative and explanatory objects. Third, changes in F_t , not merely R_t , can be candidate objects of justice because they redistribute future capacities to form, alter, contest, maintain, or exit relations. Fourth, evaluation of a relation does not itself establish authority to transform it. Other possible contributions, including a more complete temporal taxonomy of justice or a theory of future relational regions, should remain provisional until the literature review demonstrates that they are both needed and sufficiently distinct from existing work.

The paper must be equally clear about what is probably not new. It should not claim originality for the propositions that justice can be historical rather than purely synchronic, that structural injustice can persist without individual wrongful intent, that procedures matter in addition to outcomes, that capabilities and effective opportunities differ from formal rights, that path dependence matters in institutions, that transitional justice addresses historical wrongs and institutional change, that responsibility can be forward-looking or distributed, that domination can concern arbitrary power rather than only realized interference, that exit can be constrained by dependence, or that social relations can constitute subjects and opportunities. These are established neighboring insights and belong in the literature review as antecedents rather than inventions of Generative Relational terminology.

The literature review should therefore be unusually disciplined. It should engage relational theories of justice and equality, structural injustice and social-connection approaches, procedural and deliberative justice, capability and opportunity approaches, republican accounts of domination and arbitrary power, historical entitlement and rectification, transitional justice, path dependence and historical institutionalism, relational autonomy and dependency, exit and voice, responsibility under structural constraint, and work on repair, institutional change, and future generations. The aim is not to survey every theory of justice. It is to determine which aspects of relational becoming are already well developed and where the proposed distinctions concerning generated effects, generative-rule change, transformation authority, and temporally layered judgment add genuine analytical value.

Formalization should remain subordinate to the argument. Mathematical notation is appropriate when a defined map, state, set, or transformation is genuinely being represented. It should not be used to decorate natural-language processes or imply precision that the paper has not earned. In particular, the manuscript should preserve the established writing discipline of avoiding arrow notation as shorthand for ordinary prose. Where a claim is conceptual, it should be written conceptually. Where a transformation is formally defined, the relevant mapping can be stated explicitly.

The normative discipline is equally important. Describing how a relation was generated does not determine whether it was just. Showing that an intervention changes F_t does not establish that the change is unjust. Preserving future revision is not automatically superior to durable settlement. Effective exit is not always sufficient for justice, and absence of exit is not always evidence of domination. Historical reinterpretation does not automatically alter responsibility. Authority can be necessary without being unlimited. Generativity, revisability, and re-cognizability are therefore analytical concerns whose normative weight must be argued rather than assumed.

The provisional section structure is:

1. Introduction: Justice beyond Relational States.
2. Literature Review: Relational, Procedural, Structural, Historical, and Transitional Justice.
3. The Object of Justice in a Generative Relational System.
4. Relational Genealogy and Historical Dependence.
5. Formation, Maintenance, Modification, Exit, and Removal.
6. Intention, Action, and Generated Relational Effect.
7. Immediate and Long-Horizon Relational Consequences.
8. Transformation of Generative Rules.
9. Authority over Relational Change.
10. Effective Alternatives and the Justice of Exit.
11. Justice of Quotienting and Comparison.
12. Prospective Justice and Future Relational Regions.
13. Retrospective Reinterpretation and Historical Responsibility.
14. Repair, Revision, and Re-Generation.
15. Applications to Law, Governance, Humanitarian Action, and Artificial Systems.
16. Discussion and Open Problems.
17. Conclusion.

The principal open problems should remain visible throughout drafting. The paper does not yet possess a general account of norm justification under ontological suspension. It does not yet provide a metric for comparing transformations of generative rules across heterogeneous relations. It must determine how much historical depth is relevant to a present judgment without making every case indefinitely genealogical. It must distinguish responsibility for foreseeable transformation from responsibility for remote or conceptually unavailable consequences. It must clarify when authority over a shared relational condition can expand to authority over the relation itself. It must also determine how repair should be evaluated when restoration, autonomy, stability, contestability, and future generativity point in different directions.

The working thesis is therefore deliberately limited. Justice can concern not only what relations are, but how they came to be, how they are maintained and transformed, what alternatives remain effectively available, and how present actions redistribute the rules and capacities through which future relations can change. A Generative Relational account does not supply an automatic verdict on these transformations. Its contribution is to make the temporal and generative objects of judgment visible enough that established and future normative theories can evaluate them without collapsing history, action, effect, authority, and future relational possibility into a single state description.

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Notices

Status. This working discussion paper records an evolving stage of the author’s position. Its definitions, formal constructions, section structure, literature map, and originality claims remain subject to revision. The present draft is preliminary and should not be read as claiming a completed general theory of justice, responsibility, relational transformation, or historical judgment.

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Statement on the use of language models. The exploratory discussions and preparation of this paper involved OpenAI’s ChatGPT. ChatGPT supported exploratory dialogue, formal reconstruction, source discovery followed by source verification, argumentative criticism, and drafting in $\text{\LaTeX}$. The author selected the research questions, directed and approved the theoretical commitments and epistemic status of the claims, and bears sole responsibility for the manuscript, including its definitions, formal constructions, taxonomy, arguments, conclusions, and errors. Authorship credit remains with the human author.

1 Introduction: Justice beyond Relational States

Questions of justice are often posed as questions about a state of affairs. Who has what? Which rights are recognized? Which capabilities are effectively available? Which procedures were followed? Which persons or groups occupy positions of domination, dependency, exclusion, or advantage? These are indispensable questions. Yet they can become incomplete when the object under evaluation is not merely a distribution or institutional arrangement at a moment, but a relation that has been formed, maintained, revised, constrained, and made transformable through time. A relation can look acceptable at the present moment while carrying a history of coercive formation. It can appear voluntary while effective exit has gradually been made unaffordable. It can be improved in one respect by an intervention that simultaneously centralizes future authority. A temporary protective arrangement can become the infrastructure through which later dependency is reproduced. Conversely, a present disruption may be part of a transformation that expands effective alternatives or restores the possibility of contestation.

The problem addressed in this paper begins from this temporal asymmetry. A snapshot of a relation does not exhaust the morally and politically relevant information that may be contained in its history or in the conditions governing its future transformation. The paper therefore asks what changes when justice is directed not only toward relational states, but toward *relational becoming*: the historically generated processes through which relations are formed, maintained, modified, exited, removed, replaced, and rendered more or less transformable.

The proposal is deliberately narrower than a general theory of justice. It does not claim that every feature of relational history is normatively relevant, that change is intrinsically good, or that a more open relational future is always more just. It does not treat generativity as an overriding value. Nor does it offer a scalar function that ranks complete relational histories. The aim is analytical: to identify distinctions that disappear when present states, interventions, and long-horizon relational consequences are collapsed into a single object of evaluation.

1.1 The problem of state-equivalent but history-different relations

Consider two relations, $R_t^{(1)}$ and $R_t^{(2)}$, that are similar under the variables ordinarily used by an evaluator at time t . The participants have comparable resources, formal rights, observable bargaining positions,

and present patterns of interaction. It may nevertheless matter that the first relation was formed through revocable agreement while the second emerged after dispossession eliminated the participant's alternatives. It may matter that one relation can be exited at moderate cost while the other is sustained through dependencies accumulated over many years. It may matter that the first preserves multiple channels of future contestation while the second concentrates the power to modify the relation in a single actor.

This possibility motivates a basic analytical claim.

Claim 1.1 (State similarity does not settle justice similarity). Similarity between two present relational configurations under a specified comparison does not, by itself, establish similarity in their justice-relevant histories, authorities, exit conditions, or future transformation structures.

The claim is modest. It does not state that history always overrides present conditions. It states only that a justice analysis may lose relevant information if it identifies its object exclusively with the current relational state. Historical formation, maintenance, and transformability can be analytically distinct from present structure.

The point is especially important where relations are path-dependent. A present dependency can encode earlier restrictions on education, mobility, legal status, property, institutional recognition, technological access, or social membership. A presently symmetric contract may rest on a history that produced highly asymmetric fallback positions. A formally equal procedure may operate inside an institutional environment whose alternatives were themselves generated unequally. In such cases, the historical trajectory does not merely provide background narrative. It can help explain which present options exist, why some choices are costly, who possesses credible exit, and how authority became concentrated.

The same problem appears in relations that have apparently improved. Suppose an intervention reduces an immediate harm but also changes who can later define the problem, revise the governing rule, access records, or terminate the arrangement. A snapshot taken after the intervention may register the improvement while missing the newly created concentration of future transformation power. The justice question therefore has at least two temporal objects: the changed relation and the changed conditions under which later relations can change.

1.2 Relational becoming as an object of inquiry

The term *relational becoming* is used here to designate the temporal and generative organization of relations, not a metaphysical doctrine that all change is inherently valuable. A relation may pass through analytically distinguishable modes such as formation, maintenance, modification, expansion, contraction, suspension, exit, removal, replacement, and subsequent relation creation. These modes need not occur in a fixed sequence, and several can coexist. A relation may be maintained in one institutional dimension while being modified in another; formal exit may coexist with practical dependency; one relation may be terminated while its effects are reproduced through a replacement relation.

Treating these modes separately allows justice questions to be asked with greater precision. Formation raises questions about consent, bargaining position, prior alternatives, and authority to establish the relation. Maintenance raises questions about the mechanisms through which the relation persists, including dependence, enforcement, habit, infrastructure, and institutional reproduction. Modification raises questions about who can propose, veto, or implement change. Exit raises questions about formal permission and effective feasibility. Removal and replacement raise questions about downstream dependence and about whether an apparently terminated relation survives in another form.

This lifecycle perspective is compatible with many established theories of justice. A capability approach can ask how different phases affect substantive opportunities. A relational egalitarian account can ask how patterns of domination or social standing are produced and maintained. Structural injustice approaches can examine the processes that reproduce disadvantage. Procedural theories can evaluate how relational transformations are authorized. Transitional and historical justice literatures can examine responses to inherited wrongs. The present paper does not attempt to replace these traditions. Its narrower purpose is to provide a common temporal scaffold within which their different normative concerns can be attached to distinct parts of relational becoming.

1.3 Intention, action, and generated relational effect

A second motivation concerns the tendency to compress intention, action, and consequence into a single description. These objects should be separated.

An actor can intend to protect another party, perform an intervention that is consistent with that intention, and nevertheless generate a relation of durable dependency. A regulator can intend to reduce discrimination, implement a reporting system, and unintentionally centralize interpretive authority in the institution that controls the required data infrastructure. A temporary emergency measure can be adopted under conditions that make it reasonable at the time and yet produce a durable administrative capacity that later survives its initial justification. None of these examples establishes injustice by itself. They show that different normative questions attach to different stages of agency and effect.

Claim 1.2 (Generated-effect distinction). The normative assessment of an actor's intention, the assessment of the action actually performed, and the assessment of the relational structure generated by that action are analytically distinct.

This distinction matters for responsibility. A harmful generated effect may be unjust without being fully attributable to the actor who produced it. Foreseeability, available evidence, institutional role, effective alternatives, causal contribution, and later opportunities for correction may all matter. The paper therefore does not infer responsibility directly from undesirable relational effects. It first insists that the effect itself be visible as an object of justice before responsibility for it is assigned.

The generated-effect distinction also prevents a familiar mistake in institutional analysis: evaluating reforms exclusively by their announced purpose or first-order outcome. Relations often persist beyond the decisions that created them. Infrastructure, precedent, contractual dependency, data standards, organizational routines, and changes in bargaining position can outlast the intervention. Justice of relational becoming therefore requires attention to what an action leaves behind as a relational condition, not only to what it immediately accomplishes.

1.4 Generative rules and second-order transformation

The strongest theoretical proposal of the paper concerns what will be called a *generative rule*. The term is intentionally broad. It refers to the historically situated structure that helps determine how a relation can subsequently be formed, modified, contested, exited, or reproduced. Depending on the domain, this structure may include legal rules, technological architecture, resource control, organizational procedure, social norms, communication protocols, enforcement capacities, and accumulated dependencies.

Let R_t denote a relational configuration at time t , and let F_t denote a working representation of the transition structure relevant to subsequent relational change. For a formally specified action A_t , the paper permits the representation

$$A_t : (R_t, F_t) \mapsto (R_{t+1}, F_{t+1}). \quad (1)$$

Equation (1) is not intended as a complete causal model of social change. It is a compact way to separate two analytically different effects: a change in the relational state and a change in the structure governing later transformation. The latter may involve, for example, a new veto, a newly centralized database, altered ownership of essential infrastructure, a revised exit cost, a new procedure for contesting decisions, or a change in who possesses authority to modify the relation.

The difference between F_t and F_{t+1} is therefore a candidate object of justice. An intervention can improve R_{t+1} while making F_{t+1} more concentrated, less contestable, or more dependent on one actor. Conversely, an intervention can temporarily worsen some observable feature of R_{t+1} while creating new capacities for exit, representation, or later revision. The point is not that one of these patterns is always preferable. It is that a state-only evaluation can conceal the redistribution of future transformation power.

This claim should not be confused with a demand to maximize openness. Some relations require stability. Some rights become meaningful only through durable institutions. Some forms of closure

protect vulnerable participants, reduce arbitrary revision, or make long-term cooperation possible. A completely revisable relation can itself be oppressive when one actor has greater resources to exploit constant renegotiation. For this reason, the paper treats F_t as an object to be evaluated, not as an object whose flexibility should be maximized.

1.5 Authority to transform as a separate question

A third motivation arises from the difference between identifying an objectionable relation and possessing authority to change it. Contemporary political and ethical arguments sometimes move too quickly from diagnosis to intervention. If a relation is classified as harmful, exploitative, dependent, discriminatory, or domination-producing, the practical discussion can immediately turn toward reform. Yet the authority to transform a relation is not contained in the judgment that the relation is objectionable.

A researcher may identify a structural asymmetry without having standing to reorganize the participants' relation. A state may possess formal authority but lack adequate interpretation of the relation it seeks to change. An institution may be causally implicated in a harmful structure and thereby occupy a different normative position from a distant observer. Participants may disagree about whether an external intervention is protective or intrusive. In heterogeneous relations, the would-be intervener may not even share the interpretive categories through which the relation is meaningful to its participants.

The paper therefore maintains a strict separation between evaluation and transformation authority.

Claim 1.3 (Authority distinction). A justified negative judgment about a relation does not, by itself, establish the standing, permission, obligation, or authority of a particular actor to transform that relation.

This distinction is especially important for humanitarian action, governance, law, institutional reform, and cross-species or artificial relations. It prevents the vocabulary of justice from functioning as an automatic jurisdictional claim. At the same time, the distinction does not entail passivity. Authority can arise from institutional role, causal implication, entrusted responsibility, dependency, consent, collective decision, or other normatively relevant relations. The point is that these grounds require separate reconstruction and argument.

1.6 Effective alternatives and the justice of exit

Relational becoming also requires attention to alternatives. A relation may be formally voluntary while the participant's effective alternatives are extremely narrow. This paper therefore distinguishes the formal option space $\Omega_i^{\text{formal}}(t)$ from the effective option space $\Omega_i^{\text{effective}}(t)$, without claiming that effective options can always be represented as a stable set.

The distinction is familiar in capability, coercion, dependency, and freedom literatures. Its role here is narrower: it allows relational history to be connected to the practical structure of present choice. Past relations can alter present exit costs, skills, legal status, material resources, social recognition, informational access, and the credibility of alternatives. A present "choice" can therefore be partly constituted by a history that generated the chooser's option space.

Exit deserves special attention because it is frequently treated as evidence of voluntariness. The mere availability of formal exit is insufficient if leaving requires catastrophic loss, exposes the participant to retaliation, destroys access to basic infrastructure, or depends on resources controlled by the other party. Yet the paper also rejects the idea that all just relations must be easily terminable. Family, ecological, political, historical, and infrastructural relations can be partly constitutive or non-optional. The justice question concerns the relational conditions of exit, refusal, revision, and dependence, not a universal norm of frictionless departure.

1.7 Five temporal standpoints of judgment

The analysis developed in later sections will distinguish five temporal standpoints. They are not offered as five independent theories of justice. They are locations from which different normative questions become visible.

1. **Genealogical judgment** asks how the relation was formed and what histories of power, consent, exclusion, dependency, or institutional authorization contributed to its emergence.
2. **Present judgment** asks what the relation is now, including current distributions, dependencies, capabilities, forms of standing, and effective alternatives.
3. **Prospective judgment** asks what future relational possibilities, authorities, exit conditions, and transformation structures are being created or narrowed.
4. **Realized-consequence judgment** asks what relational effects were actually generated, including effects not intended or fully foreseen by the actor.
5. **Retrospective reinterpretation** asks how later evidence, concepts, archives, or interpretive manifolds alter the reconstruction of an earlier relation.

The fifth standpoint introduces a delicate problem. Later societies often possess concepts and evidence unavailable to earlier actors. Reinterpretation can reveal injuries or structures that were previously obscured. Yet later recognizability does not automatically establish that an earlier actor possessed the same interpretive resources, options, or foreseeability. Historical reinterpretation and retrospective responsibility must therefore be separated. The former concerns what the relation can now be understood to have been; the latter concerns what responsibility can reasonably be attributed to historically situated actors.

1.8 Justice of comparison and quotienting

Relational justice also depends on comparison. Claims that two cases should be treated alike or differently require a decision about which differences matter. Full relational histories are rarely identical. Comparison therefore depends on some quotient or coarse-graining under which selected differences are ignored and others are preserved.

This paper will not repeat a general theory of quotient power developed elsewhere. It uses one question as a methodological discipline:

Equivalent modulo what, for which evaluative purpose, and under whose authority?

The question matters for relational becoming because history can disappear under an apparently reasonable comparison. Two employment relations may have identical current contractual terms while differing in the historical constraints that produced consent. Two institutional reforms may produce similar immediate outcomes while creating very different future revision structures. Two exit opportunities may look formally identical while carrying radically different effective costs. Comparison that ignores these differences can erase precisely the temporal information the paper seeks to recover.

At the same time, maximal historical differentiation is not the goal. Justice often requires abstraction. Legal equality, common protections, statistical reasoning, and institutional coordination depend on treating some differences as irrelevant. The issue is therefore not whether quotienting occurs, but whether the chosen quotient is appropriate to the normative question and sufficiently contestable when it suppresses consequential history.

1.9 Scope, contributions, and limits

The paper develops four candidate contributions. First, it argues that justice analysis may need to distinguish relational states from relational histories and lifecycle conditions. Second, it separates intention, performed action, and generated relational effect. Third, it treats changes in the generative rule F_t as candidate objects of justice, thereby making visible interventions that redistribute future capacities to form, revise, contest, or exit relations. Fourth, it treats authority over relational transformation as analytically distinct from the judgment that a relation should change.

These claims should be interpreted conservatively. None is offered as proof that existing theories of justice are static, ahistorical, or incapable of addressing process. Structural injustice, historical injustice, transitional justice, capability theory, relational egalitarianism, recognition theory, republican approaches to domination, theories of coercion, procedural justice, and institutional political economy already contain substantial resources for analyzing histories and changing relations. Section 2 will therefore review these neighboring literatures before stronger originality claims are made.

The present framework also leaves several problems deliberately open. It does not yet supply a complete account of norm justification. It does not specify a universal metric for comparing generative rules. It does not resolve how much weight genealogy should receive relative to current welfare, capability, rights, or recognition. It does not settle the relation between historical wrongdoing and present responsibility. It does not establish a general right to exit or a general duty to preserve future options. It does not assume that actors possess complete knowledge of the relational effects they generate.

The paper instead adopts a methodological objective: to make the temporal structure of justice questions harder to erase. A present relation has a history; an intervention has effects beyond its stated purpose; a decision can redistribute future transformation authority; and a later interpretation can change what earlier relations become recognizable as. Once these objects are distinguished, established normative theories can evaluate them more precisely, and disagreements that previously appeared to concern a single state may be recognized as disagreements about different temporal dimensions of relational becoming.

The rest of the paper proceeds accordingly. Section 2 reviews relevant literatures on relational, structural, historical, procedural, transitional, capability, domination, coercion, and responsibility-centered accounts of justice. Section 3 clarifies the object of justice in a generative relational system. Sections 4–7 examine genealogy, lifecycle, agency, generated effects, and long-horizon consequences. Section 8 develops the analysis of changes in generative rules. Sections 9–13 address authority, exit, comparison, future relational regions, and retrospective reinterpretation. Sections 14–15 turn to repair, revision, and applications. Section 16 identifies limits and open problems, and Section 17 concludes.

2 Literature Review: Relational, Structural, Historical, Procedural, and Transitional Approaches to Justice

The central problem of this paper is not that existing theories of justice ignore history, process, institutions, or relations. That would be an indefensible starting point. A substantial range of political philosophy, social theory, legal theory, and historical institutionalism already treats justice as sensitive to social relations, structural conditions, procedures, past wrongs, institutional transitions, effective freedoms, domination, responsibility, and temporal sequence. The task here is therefore narrower. This section asks what these literatures already make visible, where they overlap with the present framework, and what remains analytically under-specified if the object of inquiry is not only a distribution, procedure, institution, or current relation, but the historical process through which a relation is formed, maintained, transformed, exited, removed, and made capable of further change.

The review is organized around neighboring traditions rather than around a single genealogy. Relational egalitarianism and recognition theory illuminate the justice of social relations themselves. Structural-injustice theory shifts attention from isolated acts to processes and institutions that reproduce disadvantage. Procedural theories establish that the fairness of a process can matter independently of its final outcome. Historical and rectificatory theories show why provenance and inherited effects can remain normatively relevant. Transitional justice makes transformation across political orders an explicit object of legal and normative inquiry. Capability approaches clarify the difference between formal permission and substantive freedom. Republican theories of domination foreground dependence on uncontrolled power. Historical institutionalism, although not itself a theory of justice, explains why timing, sequence, increasing returns, and path dependence can make present institutions dependent on earlier choices. Taken together, these traditions already provide much of the conceptual background required for a theory of relational becoming.

The residual question is more specific. When an action or institutional change modifies not only a present relation but also the conditions under which future relations can be formed, contested, exited, or revised, what exactly should justice evaluate? This paper uses the idea of a *generative rule* to isolate that problem, but the literature review must first establish how far existing theories already reach before any originality claim is made.

2.1 From distributions to relations

Contemporary theories of justice are often introduced through questions of distribution: who receives which resources, opportunities, rights, burdens, offices, or social goods. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* famously places the basic structure of society at the center of justice and treats major social institutions as shaping the distribution of fundamental rights, duties, and advantages (Rawls 1999). Even within a theory commonly described as distributive, then, institutions and the terms of social cooperation are not incidental. They form the background through which distributions are produced and stabilized.

Relational egalitarianism makes the relational object more explicit. Anderson's critique of luck egalitarianism argues that the point of equality cannot be captured adequately by compensating individuals for brute bad luck while leaving hierarchical or humiliating social relations intact (Anderson 1999). The egalitarian aim is instead connected to the standing of persons as equals and to the social conditions that allow democratic citizens to participate without oppression, domination, or stigmatizing dependence. Later relational-egalitarian literature has developed this family of claims in different directions, but the shared shift is important for the present paper: a just society cannot be assessed solely by the pattern of distributive holdings because the form of relation among persons also matters.

Recognition theory provides another route to a relational conception of justice. Honneth's recognition-theoretical work treats experiences of disrespect and withheld recognition as central to social injustice and ties justice to institutionalized patterns of recognition (Honneth 2004). The emphasis differs from Anderson's democratic equality, but both approaches resist a purely end-state picture in which justice is exhausted by an allocation vector. They direct attention to how persons are socially positioned, addressed, valued, and enabled to participate.

These traditions are close to the concerns of relational becoming, but they do not by themselves resolve the temporal problem developed here. A relation can be objectionable because it expresses domination or unequal standing now. The present paper asks in addition how that relation came to exist, which alternatives were suppressed during its formation, whether its present appearance hides a coercive genealogy, and whether interventions into the relation alter the future conditions of standing, contestation, or exit. The contribution sought here therefore does not consist in claiming that relations matter to justice. That claim is already mature. The narrower question concerns the justice of the relation's *becoming*.

2.2 Structural injustice and responsibility without a single wrongful act

Young's account of structural injustice is another essential antecedent. In *Responsibility for Justice*, Young argues that serious injustice can arise from structural processes in which many actors participate even when no single actor's conduct can be isolated as the sole wrongful cause (Young 2011). Her social connection model distinguishes political responsibility for transforming unjust structures from backward-looking liability based on individualized fault. Responsibility is connected to participation in structural processes and is primarily forward-looking in orientation.

This framework already displaces several assumptions that a theory of relational becoming must also reject. It refuses to reduce justice to discrete intentional wrongdoing, treats ongoing social processes as proper objects of analysis, and recognizes that responsibility can be distributed across actors whose contributions differ in power, privilege, interest, and collective capacity. It also connects structure to transformation: the point of political responsibility is not simply to identify an unjust condition, but to join with others in changing the processes that reproduce it.

The present framework inherits this process sensitivity but asks a somewhat different question. Structural-injustice theory typically identifies a structural process whose reproduction generates unjust

outcomes or positions. The problem of relational becoming includes that case, but also asks whether the *rules of transformation themselves* are altered by action. An intervention can change the current structure while also concentrating authority over future modification. A reform can reduce one form of exclusion while making future exit more difficult. A temporary emergency arrangement can create an enduring capacity to modify relations unilaterally. The point is not that structural justice cannot analyze such cases. Rather, the generative-rule vocabulary isolates a second-order object that may otherwise remain implicit: the conditions governing how future relational change can occur.

Young's account also helps discipline the present paper's treatment of responsibility. If an action contributes to a broader process, causal implication and normative responsibility must not be collapsed. The same holds for generated relational effects. A person or institution may help produce an unjust future relation without having intended that relation, but the appropriate attribution of responsibility still depends on knowledge, foreseeability, power, alternatives, role, and other normative considerations. The distinction between generated effect and attributed responsibility is therefore preserved throughout this paper.

2.3 Procedural justice and the independent value of process

Procedural theories provide a second important foundation. Rawls's distinction among perfect, imperfect, and pure procedural justice is influential precisely because it shows that the justice of a process cannot always be reduced to an independently specified just outcome (Rawls 1999). In some contexts, a procedure matters because it is the appropriate way to determine an outcome; in others, procedural fairness contributes an independent normative dimension even when the result could have been reached by another route.

The wider procedural-justice literature similarly emphasizes features such as voice, neutrality, respectful treatment, and trustworthy decision-making in institutional encounters. These insights are important to relational becoming because formation, modification, and exit from relations are often mediated by procedures. A relation established through informed, contestable, and non-coercive procedures can differ normatively from an otherwise similar relation imposed without voice or review. Likewise, the procedures governing revision and exit can matter independently of the relation's present substantive benefits.

The present paper nevertheless uses "process" in a broader temporal sense than procedural justice ordinarily does. A procedure is usually a specified method for arriving at a decision, allocating a good, adjudicating a dispute, or authorizing an institutional act. Relational becoming includes such procedures, but it also includes the longer history before and after the decision: how the relevant parties acquired their options, how dependencies were generated, how procedures themselves became authoritative, and how a decision changes the procedures or capacities available for later transformations.

This distinction matters because a procedurally fair intervention can still generate a future structure in which contestation, revision, or exit becomes more difficult. Conversely, an imperfectly designed procedure may generate institutions that later expand meaningful participation. Neither fact settles the normative judgment, but both show why the temporal scope of evaluation can extend beyond the fairness of the immediate procedure. The paper therefore treats procedural justice as one important component within a larger analysis of relational transformation rather than as an alternative to it.

2.4 Historical entitlement, historic injustice, and rectification

Historical theories of justice make provenance normatively explicit. Nozick's entitlement theory is an especially clear example of a historical conception: whether a holding is just depends on the justice of its acquisition and transfer rather than only on whether the resulting distribution fits a preferred pattern (Nozick 1974). Whatever one thinks of the substantive libertarian theory, its methodological importance is substantial. It demonstrates that two identical present distributions can receive different judgments because their histories differ.

The literature on historic injustice and rectification develops this temporal sensitivity in more complex settings. Waldron's discussion of superseding historic injustice asks whether and when historical entitlements or claims can be altered by subsequent changes in circumstances, thereby resisting a simple view in which every historical wrong produces an indefinitely fixed remedial requirement (Waldron 1992). Butt's account of rectifying international injustice distinguishes several morally relevant connections between present actors and past injustice, including continuing benefit, inherited entitlement, and ongoing failures of rectification (Butt 2008). These debates demonstrate that historical relevance is neither all-or-nothing nor reducible to ancestry. The normative significance of the past depends on the relation between past acts, present holdings, continuing effects, institutions, and current agents.

This literature is directly relevant to relational becoming. A present relation may inherit benefits, dependencies, exclusions, or authority from earlier injustice. Its justice cannot be determined simply by observing the current state. At the same time, history cannot be treated as an indefinitely decisive trump. Later circumstances can alter what restitution, restoration, or repair would mean; affected parties can change; social goods can become embedded in new relations; and remedies can generate fresh injustices.

The present paper therefore adopts a deliberately non-maximal historical stance. Genealogy is an object of justice, not an automatic verdict. The fact that a relation arose from an objectionable history can be normatively important without implying that the only just response is restoration of a prior state. Likewise, later reinterpretation of a past relation can reveal injuries previously obscured without automatically establishing that historical actors possessed the concepts, evidence, or alternatives available to present interpreters. These distinctions prepare the later separation between retrospective reinterpretation and retrospective responsibility.

2.5 Transitional justice and justice during transformation

Transitional justice is perhaps the neighboring literature most explicitly concerned with justice under conditions of institutional change. Teitel's foundational account examines how societies respond legally and politically to legacies of repression during transitions from illiberal rule and emphasizes the tension between backward-looking responses to the past and forward-looking construction of a new political order (Teitel 2000). Trials, reparations, constitutional change, administrative reform, and historical reckoning are not merely responses to completed wrongs; they can participate in constituting the emerging regime.

This literature is crucial for the present paper because it shows that justice can be transformative rather than merely corrective. Institutions adopted to address past injustice can shape the future normative order. Decisions about prosecution, amnesty, restitution, constitutional design, and institutional vetting can change the relations among citizens, officials, victims, and the state. Justice in transition therefore already involves questions about how responses to the past generate future political relations.

The scope of relational becoming is both broader and more abstract. Transitional justice generally concerns periods of large-scale political transition following authoritarianism, conflict, or systematic repression. The present paper asks whether a similar analytical structure appears in more ordinary settings whenever an action changes both a relation and the conditions governing its later transformation. Employment reform, family law, humanitarian intervention, platform governance, artificial-agent design, or institutional restructuring can all contain second-order changes in future authority and option spaces even when they are not instances of regime transition.

The paper should therefore not claim to discover the idea that justice can be constitutive of future order. Transitional-justice theory already establishes that point in an especially demanding domain. The narrower contribution is to generalize one temporal question cautiously: in which kinds of relational transformation should justice attend not only to the immediate reform but also to the rule structure that reform leaves behind?

2.6 Capabilities, effective freedom, and the structure of alternatives

The capability approach provides another important bridge between state assessment and relational history. Sen's work shifts evaluative attention from resources or formal entitlements toward the substantive

freedoms people actually have to achieve valuable functionings (Sen 1999). Nussbaum develops a more specified capabilities account and extends questions of justice to disability, nationality, and non-human animals (Nussbaum 2006). A central implication is that formally identical rights or resources can generate very different practical opportunities because conversion conditions differ.

This distinction is central to the present paper's treatment of exit and alternative possibilities. A contractual right to leave a relation does not establish that exit is substantively available. Material dependence, legal status, disability, social isolation, information deficits, retaliation risk, or loss of essential infrastructure can make a formal option practically inaccessible. Similarly, the justice of a newly created relation cannot be inferred from nominal consent if the historical process has already narrowed the participant's effective alternatives.

The capability tradition therefore supplies important normative and analytical resources for thinking about option spaces. The present paper does not propose an alternative metric of freedom. Its narrower use of the idea is temporal. It asks how relations and institutions *generate* the effective alternatives that later appear in choice situations. Instead of treating the option set as a fixed background to decision, relational becoming asks how that background was historically produced and how present interventions may expand, narrow, or redistribute future alternatives.

This temporal use also creates a limit. More options are not automatically better, and justice cannot be reduced to maximizing an undifferentiated option space. Some constraints are protective, constitutive, or required for coordination. Some relations are valuable precisely because they involve durable commitment. Capability-sensitive analysis therefore helps the paper distinguish formal from effective alternatives without committing it to a universal norm of maximal openness or frictionless exit.

2.7 Domination, dependence, and uncontrolled relational power

Republican theories of freedom as non-domination contribute a further relational dimension. Pettit's account distinguishes domination from mere interference by focusing on exposure to another's capacity for arbitrary or uncontrolled interference (Pettit 1997). A person may be dominated even when interference is infrequent if another actor possesses a power of interference that the person cannot adequately control or contest.

This perspective is especially relevant to relational transformation because it makes latent power visible. A reform can improve present welfare while simultaneously placing one party under a newly concentrated capacity to alter the relation later. A platform, regulator, employer, guardian, or humanitarian institution may refrain from exercising a broad discretionary power while nevertheless holding it. The justice problem therefore concerns not only what has been done, but what forms of unilateral transformation have become institutionally possible.

The generative-rule analysis developed later in this paper is compatible with this insight but not reducible to it. Republican non-domination offers a substantive normative ideal centered on uncontrolled power. The present framework is more diagnostically open. A change in future transformation capacity is treated as an object requiring evaluation; the paper does not assume in advance that every concentration of transformation authority constitutes domination or injustice. Emergency powers, fiduciary relations, technical administration, guardianship, or collectively authorized delegation may create asymmetric capacities whose justification depends on purpose, safeguards, review, duration, and contestability.

Republican theory therefore provides a powerful normative vocabulary for one class of generative-rule problems. The present paper uses that literature to avoid redescribing dependence and unilateral power as new discoveries while retaining a broader question about how future relational-change capacities should be represented in justice analysis.

2.8 Path dependence and historical institutionalism

Historical institutionalism is not itself a theory of justice, but its analysis of temporal sequence is indispensable for a theory of relational becoming. Pierson's account of increasing returns emphasizes that

political processes can become path dependent because early choices generate self-reinforcing mechanisms, raise the costs of reversal, and make timing and sequence consequential (Pierson 2000). Mahoney similarly distinguishes path-dependent sequences in which contingent events initiate self-reinforcing or reactive dynamics whose later outcomes cannot be explained adequately by treating history as a set of interchangeable observations (Mahoney 2000).

These mechanisms matter normatively because they clarify how modest present interventions can have disproportionate future effects. A rule that initially appears temporary can acquire constituencies, infrastructure, sunk costs, legal precedents, and organizational routines. An institutional arrangement can make alternatives progressively harder to imagine or implement. A dependency can deepen because earlier adaptations make exit more costly. In such cases, the justice of a present decision may depend partly on its contribution to a path whose later reversal is difficult.

The paper must nevertheless resist a common slippage. Path dependence is a causal or historical property, not a moral verdict. A self-reinforcing institution can be beneficial, harmful, or mixed. Lock-in can protect rights as well as entrench injustice. Stability can secure expectations and reduce vulnerability. The relevance of path dependence to justice therefore lies in identifying temporal mechanisms that alter future option spaces and transformation costs, not in treating persistence itself as wrongful.

This literature helps motivate the idea of a generative rule without turning that idea into a mysterious additional entity. In many institutional settings, the practical rules of future transformation are distributed across law, organizational routines, resource dependencies, conventions, technical architectures, and accumulated expectations. Historical institutionalism provides empirical mechanisms through which these arrangements can become durable. The later formal notation involving a transition structure should therefore be read as an analytical compression of such mechanisms, not as a claim that social relations literally follow a single deterministic law.

2.9 Backward-looking and forward-looking responsibility

The literatures reviewed above also reveal an important distinction in responsibility. Historical and liability-centered approaches often ask who caused or wrongfully produced a condition and what is owed as a consequence. Structural approaches such as Young's emphasize forward-looking political responsibility for transforming processes in which many actors are implicated. Transitional justice combines backward-looking reckoning with future institution-building. Capability and domination theories add attention to the current conditions under which agents can act, refuse, or contest.

Relational becoming requires all of these temporal orientations but should not merge them. Responsibility for forming a relation, responsibility for maintaining it, responsibility for failing to revise it, responsibility for an intervention, and responsibility for the relational effects eventually generated can fall on different actors. The person who initiated a harmful arrangement may no longer control it. A later institution may inherit power without having caused the original wrong. Beneficiaries may possess obligations of repair without personal culpability for the initiating act. An actor who performs a justified intervention may still bear responsibility for foreseeable governance capacities that the intervention creates.

This plurality is one reason the paper separates intention, action, generated effect, and transformation authority. The separation is analytical rather than exculpatory. It prevents responsibility from being assigned solely on the basis of the actor nearest to the final event while also preventing every upstream causal contributor from being treated as equally responsible. Existing responsibility theories supply the substantive criteria needed for attribution. The contribution sought here is to specify more clearly the temporal and relational locations at which those criteria may need to be applied.

2.10 What the neighboring literatures already establish

Table 1 summarizes the main contributions of the neighboring traditions and the narrower question that remains for this paper.

Table 1: Neighboring theories and the residual problem of relational becoming.

Tradition	Already established	Residual question for this paper
Relational equality and recognition	Justice concerns social standing, hierarchy, recognition, and the form of relations, not only distributions.	How should justice evaluate the historical formation and future transformability of those relations?
Structural injustice	Unjust outcomes can be generated by distributed social processes without a single culpable act.	How should analysis treat interventions that change both a structure and the conditions of its future modification?
Procedural justice	Fairness can attach to processes independently of the substantive outcome.	How should justice evaluate the longer history that generates procedures, alternatives, and later revision capacities?
Historical and rectificatory justice	Provenance, inherited effects, benefit, entitlement, and continuing failure to rectify can matter.	When does genealogy alter the judgment of a present relation without dictating simple restoration of an earlier state?
Transitional justice	Responses to past wrongdoing can participate in constituting a future political order.	Can this transformative insight be generalized cautiously beyond regime transition to ordinary relational change?
Capability approaches	Formal rights and resources can differ from substantive freedoms and effective opportunities.	How are effective alternatives historically generated, narrowed, or redistributed by relations themselves?
Republican non-domination	Latent uncontrolled power can be unjust even without continuous interference.	How should justice evaluate changes in capacities to alter relations in the future?
Historical institutionalism	Timing, sequence, increasing returns, and path dependence shape institutional persistence and reversibility.	When do these temporal mechanisms become normatively relevant objects of justice rather than merely causal explanations?
Responsibility theory	Backward-looking liability and forward-looking political responsibility can be distinguished.	At which points in a relation's lifecycle should different responsibility criteria attach?

The table makes clear why several broad novelty claims would be inappropriate. It would be wrong to claim that existing justice theory is generally static, that political philosophy ignores relations, that procedural fairness neglects process, that historical injustice theory ignores provenance, or that structural theory cannot address transformation. Each of those claims would understate mature literatures.

The paper's proposed contribution is instead a narrower form of integration. It treats the lifecycle and transformation of a relation as an explicit analytical object and asks whether justice analysis should separately represent the current relational state, its genealogy, the action taken upon it, the relational effect actually generated, the actor's authority to transform it, the participant's effective alternatives, and any change in the rule structure governing later transformations. Much of the normative content needed to evaluate these objects comes from the traditions reviewed above. The proposed framework aims to prevent those objects from being collapsed into a single judgment of the present state or the immediate action.

2.11 The residual gap: justice of relational becoming

The residual gap can now be stated more precisely. Existing theories provide strong accounts of fair distributions, equal social standing, structural injustice, fair procedures, historical claims, rectification, capabilities, domination, transition, and responsibility. What remains less explicitly unified is the justice of a relation considered across its full temporal lifecycle and across changes in the conditions governing its future transformation.

Four questions organize that gap.

First, which temporal object is being judged? A present relation, its origin, its maintenance, a proposed intervention, its realized effect, and a later reinterpretation are not the same object of evaluation. A disagreement that appears to concern “whether the relation is just” may actually concern different temporal objects.

Second, what was generated beyond the intended outcome? Actions and reforms can create dependencies, authorities, expectations, infrastructures, precedents, and exit costs that outlast the immediate purpose of the intervention. Justice analysis requires a vocabulary for these generated relational effects without reducing responsibility to mere causation.

Third, did the intervention alter the conditions of future change? Some actions affect not only who relates to whom or on what terms, but who can later revise those terms, how costly exit becomes, what forms of contestation remain available, and which actors acquire standing or capacity to intervene again. The present paper uses the language of generative rules to isolate this second-order transformation.

Fourth, who had authority to produce the transformation? A correct diagnosis of injustice does not automatically establish the standing of a particular actor to reorganize the relation. Authority, permission, obligation, and institutional competence require separate argument.

These questions motivate the concept of *justice of relational becoming*. The phrase is not intended to replace the literatures reviewed above or to introduce a universal principle of generativity. It names a methodological orientation: justice may need to evaluate how relations come into being, how they persist, how they are transformed, what alternatives their histories leave open, and how present actions redistribute the capacities through which future relations can be changed.

The following sections develop that orientation in progressively narrower form. Section 3 specifies the object of justice in a generative relational system. Section 4 examines relational genealogy and historical dependence. Section 5 distinguishes the principal stages of a relation’s lifecycle. Sections 6 and 7 separate intention, action, generated effect, and long-horizon consequence. Section 8 develops the analysis of changing generative rules. The later sections then address authority, effective alternatives and exit, comparison, prospective relational regions, retrospective reinterpretation, repair, applications, and open problems.

3 The Object of Justice in a Generative Relational System

The preceding literature review showed that contemporary theories of justice already possess substantial resources for addressing relations, structures, procedures, historical wrongs, capabilities, domination, responsibility, and institutional change. The present proposal therefore cannot rest on the observation that justice has a temporal or relational dimension. Its more specific task is to clarify what must be included in the *object of judgment* once a relation is treated as historically generated and transformable. The central question of this section is methodological: when an evaluator asks whether a relation is just, which features of that relation must remain visible long enough for the normative theory doing the evaluation to operate adequately?

This question matters because a present relational state is often an informationally compressed description. It can show who is connected to whom, which resources are currently distributed, which formal permissions exist, or which institution presently governs a domain. It need not reveal how those arrangements were produced, which alternatives were eliminated during their production, how costly exit became, or whether the current arrangement changed the rules through which future relations can be modified. A state description can therefore be accurate and still be insufficient for the normative question at hand.

The claim developed here is modest. A Generative Relational analysis should not replace existing theories of justice with a new master criterion. It should instead enlarge the analytical object supplied to those theories when the justice question depends on relational history or transformation. The result is a

richer object containing a present state, a reconstructed history, a structure governing possible transformations, and the effective relational positions from which participants can act. Whether any particular feature is normatively decisive remains a further question.

3.1 Present State and the Risk of Normative Compression

Let R_t denote a formal representation of the relational state at time t . Depending on the application, R_t may contain network relations, institutional positions, resource dependencies, legal statuses, communication channels, authority relations, or other formally specified relational variables. There is nothing intrinsically deficient about evaluating R_t . Many justice questions are correctly posed at the level of present conditions. The problem appears when R_t is treated as though it necessarily contains all information relevant to the judgment.

Consider two systems represented by $R_t^{(1)}$ and $R_t^{(2)}$. It is formally possible that

$$\begin{aligned} R_t^{(1)} &= R_t^{(2)}, \\ H_{\leq t}^{(1)} &\neq H_{\leq t}^{(2)}. \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Equation (2) states formal relations relative to the chosen state and history representations. It does not assert that the two lived situations are identical in every respect. The point is precisely that a state representation can classify two systems as the same while leaving their genealogies outside the representation.

A familiar example is a contract whose present terms are formally identical across two cases. In one case the parties arrived at those terms through relatively unconstrained bargaining. In another, one party's prior dispossession or dependency removed every effective alternative except acceptance. If the current contract is represented only by its explicit terms, the history of how the parties entered it disappears. Historical-entitlement, capability, republican, structural, or relational theories may then reach different judgments once the suppressed genealogy is restored. The Generative Relational contribution is not to choose among those judgments in advance, but to prevent the state representation from deciding the matter by omission.

This motivates a first methodological principle: a state-level representation should be treated as a projection rather than as the complete normative object whenever the theory of justice being applied is sensitive to genealogy, coercion, path dependence, capability, recognition, domination, responsibility, or institutional history. The relevant question is not whether history always matters. It is whether excluding history changes the kind of judgment the normative framework is able to make.

3.2 History as Part of the Analytical Object

Write $H_{\leq t}$ for a reconstructed history relevant to the relation under evaluation. This history is not assumed to be complete, neutral, or directly accessible. It is an evidential and interpretive reconstruction. It may include prior states, interventions, institutional decisions, transfers of control, episodes of consent or refusal, exclusions, changes in dependency, and transformations of the surrounding environment.

The phrase *relevant history* requires discipline. If every antecedent cause were included, a justice inquiry could become indefinitely genealogical. The aim is therefore not maximal historical depth. A history is relevant when excluding it would plausibly alter the interpretation of the present relation, the attribution of responsibility, the evaluation of available alternatives, or the assessment of how the relation can now be transformed. This is a purpose-indexed criterion rather than a metaphysical boundary around the "true" beginning of a relation.

Historical reconstruction also needs provenance. An account assembled from institutional records, participant testimony, inferred causal structure, and later archival evidence should preserve those sources rather than collapse them into a single authoritative narrative. The earlier work on re-cognizability is important here: later evidence or concepts may alter $H_{\leq t}$ without implying that the relation itself did

not have a history before the new interpretation became available. Justice analysis therefore operates on historically situated reconstructions and should remain revisable when its evidential basis changes.

A history-sensitive object of justice also prevents a common temporal simplification: treating a present improvement as though it settled the justice of the process that generated it. An institution may redistribute resources beneficially after a period of exclusion; a dependency relation may become less coercive; an emergency authority may later become accountable. These developments can matter greatly. They do not erase the earlier process, nor do earlier wrongs automatically determine the justice of every later state. The analytical object must be capable of containing both facts without forcing them into a single temporal verdict.

3.3 Generative Rules and Future Transformability

History alone is still insufficient for the present project. Two systems can share a similar current state and a similar reconstructed history while differing in how their relations can change from this point onward. To represent this difference, let F_t denote a formally specified transition structure governing, constraining, or probabilistically shaping admissible relational changes from time t . The term *generative rule* is used in this paper for this analytical role.

F_t need not be a literal rule encoded in one institution. It may represent a composite structure including legal competences, technological affordances, resource dependencies, veto points, communication constraints, procedures for revision, exit costs, and other factors that determine which transformations are accessible. In some applications F_t may be a transition kernel; in others it may be a set-valued correspondence or a rule system. The paper does not require a single mathematical form across all domains.

The important point is that a present state does not determine its own future transformability. Formally, two systems may satisfy

$$\begin{aligned} R_t^{(1)} &= R_t^{(2)}, \\ F_t^{(1)} &\neq F_t^{(2)}. \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

Equation (3) isolates a difference in future transformability that a state-only representation does not capture. Suppose two organizations currently distribute decision rights in the same visible way. In the first, those rights can be revised through an accessible procedure initiated by affected participants. In the second, revision requires authorization from the actor already holding concentrated control. A state-only description may report the same distribution of authority. A transformability-sensitive description records a difference that republican, procedural, relational, or capability-based theories may regard as normatively significant.

The same issue appears in dependency relations. Two individuals may currently receive the same resources and possess the same formal exit permission. Yet one relation may contain practical pathways for building alternative support, while the other has been organized so that every route to independence depends on the dominant party. The immediate state can look similar while the transition structure differs substantially.

This motivates the paper's strongest analytical extension beyond a state-plus-history model. Justice can concern not only how a present relation was generated, but also how the present arrangement redistributes the capacity to generate future relations. This claim does not establish a norm favoring maximal flexibility. Durable commitments, stable institutions, protected rights, and irreversible settlements can all be justified. The point is that the distribution of future transformability should be visible before its normative weight is decided.

3.4 A Working Relational Justice Object

For the purposes of this paper, the following tuple provides a compact formal scaffold:

$$\mathcal{J}_t := (R_t, H_{\leq t}, F_t, \{\Omega_i^{\text{eff}}(t)\}_{i \in V_t}, \Pi_t) . \tag{4}$$

Equation (4) defines the working relational justice object used in this paper. Here R_t is the present relational state; $H_{\leq t}$ is a purpose-indexed reconstructed history; F_t is the current generative or transition structure; $\Omega_i^{\text{eff}}(t)$ is the effective action set available to participant i at time t ; V_t is the set of participants represented in the analysis; and Π_t records formally specified positional information relevant to authority, dependence, control, or institutional role.

This tuple is not a justice function and contains no verdict. It is better understood as a candidate *input object* for normative evaluation. Different theories may use different components. A theory focused on procedural legitimacy may emphasize the history of decision formation and Π_t . A capability account may attend strongly to effective action sets. A republican analysis may examine dependence and the structure of discretionary control encoded in F_t . A historical-entitlement theory may give greater weight to $H_{\leq t}$. A structural-injustice account may examine how present positions are reproduced across R_t and F_t .

Nor does the tuple claim completeness. Embodiment, affect, social meaning, identity, recognition, environmental dependence, and other variables may need to be added in particular domains. The purpose of $\mathcal{J}_t$ is to prevent five analytically different objects from collapsing into the single phrase “the current relation.” It makes visible the difference between present structure, genealogy, future transformability, effective alternatives, and relational position.

Definition 3.1 (Relational justice object). A *relational justice object* is a purpose-indexed representation containing the relational state and those historical, transformational, positional, and effective-option variables whose omission would plausibly change the normative analysis being performed.

The definition is intentionally functional. It does not require every justice inquiry to include every possible variable. It requires an account of why the selected representation is sufficient for the judgment claimed.

3.5 The Lifecycle of a Relation

Once the object of justice is widened beyond a snapshot, the lifecycle of a relation becomes analytically visible. A relation may be formed, maintained, modified, expanded, contracted, suspended, exited, removed, or replaced. These are not proposed as universal natural kinds. They are recurring transformation types that allow distinct justice questions to be asked without treating every relational change as one undifferentiated event.

Formation raises questions about authorization, coercion, dependency, initial exclusion, and the distribution of bargaining power. Maintenance raises questions about who bears the costs of preserving the relation, whether continuing consent is meaningful, and which infrastructures make the relation durable. Modification raises questions about procedure, representation, and the distribution of gains and burdens created by change. Expansion and contraction raise questions about scope: whose activities, resources, identities, or dependencies are newly incorporated or released. Suspension raises questions about temporariness, emergency authority, and the conditions of restoration. Exit raises questions about formal permission, effective feasibility, and residual obligations. Removal and replacement raise questions about repair, transition costs, historical claims, and the creation of successor relations.

A lifecycle vocabulary is useful because justice can attach differently to different moments. A relation that was unjustly formed need not remain unjust in exactly the same way after substantial transformation. Conversely, a relation that was legitimately formed can become problematic through later maintenance practices, accumulating dependency, or closure of exit. The justice of formation cannot simply be inherited by every later state, and the justice of a later state cannot automatically cleanse its formation history.

This temporal differentiation also helps avoid an overly binary vocabulary of “just relation” and “unjust relation.” A relation can contain a legitimate present distribution alongside an unresolved historical claim; a procedurally fair modification can operate within a structure whose original exclusion remains relevant; an unjustly imposed institution can later acquire forms of participation that change its normative

character without making the history irrelevant. The framework therefore encourages temporally located judgments rather than total labels whenever the evidence and theory support that greater precision.

3.6 Action as Transformation of State and Rule

The analytical importance of F_t becomes clearest when action changes not only a relational state but also the structure through which later changes can occur. Let A_t denote a formally specified action or intervention. The general action map has already been defined in Equation (1). That mapping is deliberately minimal. It states only that an action can have first-order effects on the relational state and second-order effects on the transition structure. It does not specify how those effects are evaluated.

Examples are common. A court order can resolve a dispute while creating precedent that changes later institutional possibilities. A humanitarian intervention can reduce immediate harm while creating a durable dependency on the intervening infrastructure. A platform moderation rule can remove harmful content while centralizing future interpretive authority in a private institution. An emergency public-health measure can address an immediate danger while normalizing an institutional power whose later scope differs from the original justification. A labor reform can improve wages while leaving control over exit, scheduling, or collective organization untouched. In each case, the immediate relational effect and the alteration of future transformability can move in different normative directions.

The paper uses the expression ΔF_t for a formally defined change in the generative rule where the application provides a meaningful difference operator or comparison relation. The notation should not be treated as implying that every generative structure is numerical or that all rule changes are commensurable. Its role is to identify a second-order object that may otherwise remain invisible.

This distinction matters for responsibility as well. An actor may reasonably foresee an immediate effect while failing to foresee a distant institutional consequence. Another actor may intentionally redesign F_t precisely to secure future control. A third may inherit a transition structure produced by predecessors. The same present state can therefore implicate different forms of agency and responsibility depending on how F_t was altered and who possessed effective alternatives at the relevant time. Those questions are developed later; the present section only establishes that the second-order transformation belongs in the analytical object when it is causally and normatively relevant.

3.7 Effective Alternatives inside the Object of Justice

The inclusion of $\Omega_i^{\text{eff}}(t)$ requires care. The present paper does not attempt a complete theory of free will or constrained agency. It adopts a narrower distinction between options that exist formally and options that are effectively accessible under the relevant relational conditions.

An exit clause in a contract, a legal right to complain, or a formal possibility of refusing participation can be normatively important. Yet a justice analysis may also need to know whether exercising that option requires resources, knowledge, safety, social support, or institutional access that the participant lacks. Capability theory already provides a sophisticated vocabulary for substantive opportunity, and republican and structural approaches likewise emphasize dependence and constraint. The Generative Relational use of effective option sets is therefore primarily organizational: it places those concerns inside the same temporal object as relational history and generative rules.

Effective alternatives also connect history to future transformability. The option set available at time t may be partly produced by earlier actions. A participant's inability to exit today may reflect a long process of resource concentration, deskilling, information control, legal restructuring, or social isolation. A present-state analysis that records only the absence of exit can miss how that absence was generated. Conversely, a history-sensitive analysis can still overstate constraint if it ignores new alternatives that have become genuinely accessible. The tuple $\mathcal{J}_t$ is designed to keep both temporal directions visible.

3.8 Positional Information and the Problem of Transformation Authority

The final component, Π_t , is deliberately open-ended. It records formally specified relational positions relevant to the question of who can alter the relation and under what authority. Depending on the domain, this can include institutional office, ownership of infrastructure, custodial responsibility, delegated authority, dependency, jurisdiction, representation, or control over shared resources.

This component is necessary because identifying a problematic relation does not settle who may transform it. A researcher may understand a relation better than its regulator yet lack authority to impose change. A state may possess legal jurisdiction while lacking epistemic access to the affected relation. An infrastructure provider may have technical capacity to intervene without legitimate normative standing. A participant may have a strong claim to refuse a transformation without having authority to determine every effect on shared conditions.

The object of justice therefore needs to represent transformation authority as a question rather than presuppose it. Later sections will distinguish authority, capacity, responsibility, permission, and obligation more carefully. At this stage the methodological point is that a theory evaluating relational change should not smuggle a privileged transformer into the model simply because that actor can observe or alter the system.

3.9 Temporal Standpoints without a Single Temporal Verdict

The expanded object allows several temporal standpoints of judgment to coexist. A genealogical standpoint attends to formation history. A present standpoint evaluates current structure. A prospective standpoint considers accessible future relational regions. A realized-consequence standpoint asks what an intervention actually generated. A retrospective standpoint reinterprets the history after new evidence or concepts become available.

These standpoints should not be treated as stages in a mandatory sequence, nor do they necessarily converge on a single verdict. A present arrangement may be defensible under a current-distribution criterion while leaving an unresolved historical claim. A reform can be procedurally legitimate yet produce a harmful long-horizon dependency. A later reinterpretation can reveal an earlier exclusion that participants could not have understood in the same terms at the time. Justice reasoning must therefore be capable of holding temporally indexed assessments in tension.

This is especially important for the later discussion of repair. If justice were represented by a single timeless score attached to R_t , repair would appear to be movement toward a preferred state. Once history and generative rules are included, repair can instead involve multiple tasks: acknowledging historical wrongs, changing present structures, redistributing future transformability, restoring effective alternatives, limiting transformation authority, or preserving the possibility of later re-cognition. Those tasks can conflict.

3.10 Selection, Omission, and the Discipline of Representation

Expanding the object of justice creates a corresponding danger: analytical totalization. A sufficiently ambitious tuple can become a list of everything. The framework therefore needs a discipline of omission as well as inclusion.

Three questions should guide representation. First, what normative theory or practical judgment is being supported? Second, which omitted variables could plausibly reverse or materially alter that judgment? Third, what evidential basis supports the variables that have been included? These questions make the relational justice object purpose-indexed and contestable.

The same discipline applies to formalization. R_t , $H_{\leq t}$, F_t , $\Omega_i^{\text{eff}}(t)$, and Π_t are not universal ontological primitives. They are analytical components whose content depends on the case. A legal application may represent F_t through competences and procedures. A social-network application may use transition probabilities and access constraints. A humanitarian application may include logistics, dependence, communication, and protection structures. An artificial-agent application may model memory access,

resource permissions, modification rights, and communication protocols. The notation is useful only insofar as these components are operationally and conceptually defined.

A further limitation concerns interpretation. Histories, effective alternatives, and generative rules are themselves reconstructed under imperfect knowledge. The framework should not imply that expanding the object eliminates epistemic uncertainty. It can instead make uncertainty more local: an evaluator can identify whether uncertainty concerns the present state, the genealogy, the effective option set, the transition structure, or the authority relation. This localization can improve judgment without promising complete knowledge.

3.11 What This Expanded Object Does and Does Not Establish

The principal result of this section is an analytical one. When justice depends on relational becoming, a present state can be too narrow an object of evaluation. A richer object can include reconstructed history, future transformability, effective alternatives, and positions relevant to transformation authority. This makes several kinds of normative question visible that a state-only representation can obscure.

The result does not establish that history always overrides current conditions, that transformability should always be maximized, that every reduction in options is unjust, or that changes in generative rules are inherently suspicious. Stable commitments can be valuable. Institutions often need durable procedures. Some options are appropriately closed. Some transformations require authority that is not universally distributed. The framework therefore supplies objects for judgment rather than conclusions in advance.

Nor does it establish a complete theory of justice. The substantive normative work remains distributed across theories of equality, recognition, capability, domination, procedure, historical entitlement, structural responsibility, transitional justice, and other traditions. The proposed contribution is to offer those theories a temporal-generative representation when the relation under evaluation cannot be adequately understood as a present state alone.

This section also sets the agenda for what follows. The next section will examine relational genealogy and historical dependence in greater detail. Later sections will distinguish lifecycle transformations, generated effects, long-horizon consequences, changes in generative rules, authority over transformation, effective exit, comparison and quotienting, prospective justice, retrospective reinterpretation, and repair. The common methodological commitment is that justice should not be forced to choose its object too early. Before asking for a verdict, the analysis must determine whether the ethically relevant object is a state, a history, a transformation, a change in future transformability, or some structured combination of these.

4 Relational Genealogy and Historical Dependence

The previous section enlarged the object of justice beyond a present relational state. This section develops the historical component of that object. The central problem is not simply that relations have pasts. Every social, legal, institutional, and interpersonal relation does. The harder question is when and how a past remains constitutive of the relation being judged in the present. A genealogy becomes normatively relevant when prior processes help explain the present distribution of authority, dependency, effective alternatives, claims, burdens, or capacities for transformation. Historical dependence, in this sense, concerns the persistence of relational effects across time rather than the mere chronological fact that something happened earlier.

This distinction is important because historical reasoning can fail in opposite directions. One failure is temporal compression: the present is evaluated as though its current structure were self-contained. Another is genealogical inflation: increasingly remote antecedents are added until every judgment depends on an indefinitely extended history. A workable theory of relational becoming needs a criterion for historical relevance that avoids both. The present section therefore treats genealogy as purpose-indexed,

mechanism-sensitive, and revisable. It does not assume that the oldest available cause is the morally decisive one, nor that a historical origin permanently determines the justice of every later state.

4.1 Genealogy as More Than Chronology

A chronological record tells us that event e_1 preceded event e_2 . A relational genealogy asks a stronger question: what features of the present relation were generated, stabilized, constrained, or made costly to revise by those earlier processes? The difference matters because a past event can be historically prior without remaining normatively or causally relevant, while another event can become deeply constitutive of the present relation even if it occurred relatively recently.

For analytical purposes, let a reconstructed history be represented as an ordered sequence

$$H_{\leq t} := (R_{\tau_0}, A_{\tau_0}, R_{\tau_1}, A_{\tau_1}, \dots, R_t). \quad (5)$$

Equation (5) is only a scaffold. The R_{τ_k} are formally represented relational states and the A_{τ_k} are formally represented interventions, decisions, or other specified transformations. A real genealogy may also contain institutional rules, environmental shocks, omitted alternatives, interpretive changes, legal decisions, technological modifications, or other variables relevant to the domain. The notation is useful only insofar as those elements are explicitly defined.

The point of a genealogy is therefore not to reproduce every event. It is to identify historically transmitted structure. A hiring relation may be affected by earlier educational exclusion. A present property relation may depend on an earlier transfer whose legitimacy is disputed. A humanitarian institution may still operate through emergency powers created for circumstances that no longer exist. An artificial system may inherit permissions, constraints, or memory structures from a design phase that current operators did not choose. In each case, the history matters because it remains active in the conditions under which present relations operate.

This use of genealogy is compatible with, but narrower than, broad genealogical methods in social theory. The paper does not claim that every normative concept must be genealogically dissolved, nor that tracing the contingent emergence of a practice invalidates it. The aim is more practical: when a justice judgment would materially change if historically generated dependencies or powers were restored to view, those historical features belong in the object of analysis.

4.2 Purpose-Indexed Historical Relevance

The phrase *relevant history* requires an explicit selection rule. Otherwise the framework risks making every present relation dependent on an unbounded past. A useful starting point is to ask which earlier processes remain connected to the present normative question through identifiable mechanisms.

Several kinds of connection are especially important. An earlier process may remain relevant because it generated a current entitlement or burden; because it concentrated resources or authority; because it removed alternatives that have not been restored; because it created an institutional rule that still structures later decisions; because it altered the costs of exit or contestation; because it produced a durable classification or status; or because it shaped the evidential record through which the relation can now be reconstructed. These are different mechanisms and should not be collapsed into a single category of “historical influence.”

The relevant temporal depth therefore depends on the question. A dispute about present procedural fairness may require only recent institutional history. A claim involving inherited property, displacement, or historical exclusion may require a much longer horizon. An analysis of a technological dependency may need to return to the architectural decisions through which interoperability, access, or modification rights were originally fixed. Historical depth is thus a property of the inquiry rather than a universal number of years or generations.

Definition 4.1 (Purpose-indexed relational genealogy). A purpose-indexed relational genealogy is a reconstruction of those prior events, states, decisions, and institutional transformations whose exclusion

would plausibly alter the evaluation of the present relation for the specified normative or practical question.

This definition is intentionally demanding. It requires a plausible connection between the historical material included and the judgment being supported. Merely adding historical detail does not improve an analysis. A genealogy should explain why a particular antecedent remains normatively or causally live.

The same criterion can justify omission. If a remote event no longer affects authority, resources, effective alternatives, claims, institutional rules, or the interpretation of the present relation, including it may add narrative depth without adding normative relevance. The discipline of genealogy therefore includes the ability to stop.

4.3 Historical Dependence and Path Dependence

The literature on path dependence is useful because it shows how sequences can matter even when later actors do not intentionally preserve the original arrangement. Increasing returns, institutional complementarities, learning effects, coordination effects, switching costs, and feedback mechanisms can make some trajectories increasingly difficult to reverse (Pierson 2000; Mahoney 2000). These mechanisms help explain why the present cannot always be treated as a fresh choice among currently imaginable alternatives.

For this paper, path dependence is primarily an explanatory concept. It identifies processes through which earlier relational arrangements alter the feasibility or cost of later alternatives. It does not by itself establish injustice. A path-dependent institution may be beneficial, legitimate, or simply stable. Conversely, an unjust relation need not be path dependent. The normative question arises when the historically produced path changes something that a relevant theory of justice cares about: effective opportunity, domination, recognition, distribution, procedure, responsibility, or access to revision.

This distinction matters because the language of “lock-in” can too quickly become evaluative. Some forms of institutional durability are desirable. Constitutional rights, long-term care commitments, ecological protections, and reliable public infrastructures may be intentionally difficult to reverse. A justice analysis should therefore ask not whether a path has become durable, but how that durability was produced, whose interests and options it structures, what forms of contestation remain available, and whether the costs of revision are themselves normatively significant.

Historical dependence can also be asymmetric. A past institutional decision may be cheap for one participant to overcome but prohibitively costly for another. The same formal rule can therefore produce different historical burdens because actors enter the present with different inherited resources, statuses, or dependencies. This is one reason genealogical analysis should remain connected to effective alternatives rather than becoming a purely narrative account of sequence.

4.4 Constitutive History and Merely Causal History

Not every cause of a present relation is equally relevant to its justice. Some historical factors are merely causal in the weak sense that, had they not occurred, the present might have been different. Others are constitutive in a stronger analytical sense: the present relation still embodies, reproduces, or depends upon structures generated by that history.

Consider a present institutional hierarchy. Its remote origin may have involved a contingent merger, a political compromise, or an emergency appointment. Those events may explain why the institution exists in its current form. Yet if their effects have been fully displaced by later procedures that independently legitimate the current hierarchy, the original events may no longer bear much normative weight. By contrast, if the present hierarchy still distributes authority according to exclusions built into the original arrangement, the history remains constitutive of the current relation.

The distinction cannot be settled by temporal distance alone. A recent event can become historically irrelevant if its effects are fully reversed; a centuries-old arrangement can remain constitutive if its insti-

tutional consequences continue to structure present opportunity, ownership, jurisdiction, or status. What matters is the mechanism of persistence.

This also prevents a common error in historical argument: treating causal ancestry as moral contamination. The fact that a beneficial institution emerged from injustice does not automatically make every present operation of that institution unjust. Historical injustice may generate claims of rectification, compensation, recognition, institutional redesign, or other responses, but those claims require argument. Historical origin and present normative status should remain analytically connected without being collapsed.

The converse error is equally serious. A present arrangement does not become historically clean merely because current participants did not create its underlying structure. Inherited relations can remain materially and normatively significant even when no living actor authored them. This is precisely the type of problem addressed by structural and forward-looking accounts of responsibility (Young 2011). The present paper uses genealogy to identify the inherited structure; it does not infer a complete allocation of responsibility from genealogy alone.

4.5 Sedimentation of Relational Power

A relation can acquire durability through the sedimentation of many small transformations rather than one decisive founding event. Repeated administrative routines, resource transfers, classifications, defaults, technological standards, habits of deference, or accumulated dependencies can gradually alter the relational field. No single step may appear normatively decisive when examined in isolation. Their cumulative effect can nevertheless produce a present relation that would have been difficult to generate in one explicit decision.

This matters for justice because some forms of power are historically cumulative. An organization may acquire broad authority through a sequence of temporary delegations. A platform may become indispensable through repeated interoperability decisions and accumulated user dependence. A household relation may become difficult to exit through years of unequal resource control rather than a single coercive act. A governance body may gradually expand jurisdiction because each new responsibility appears locally reasonable.

Genealogical analysis can make this cumulative structure visible. It asks whether the present relation is the result of a discrete transformation, an incremental sequence, or some combination of both. This distinction can affect responsibility, legitimacy, and repair. A discrete wrongful act may support one form of rectification; distributed sedimentation may require institutional or structural change that cannot be reduced to identifying one responsible decision-maker.

The concept of sedimentation should not be romanticized or treated as necessarily oppressive. Beneficial institutions are also built cumulatively. Trust, professional competence, public infrastructure, and mutual expectations can emerge through repeated interaction. The justice question concerns what has been sedimented, through which mechanisms, under what conditions of contestability, and with what effects on present and future relations.

4.6 Branching Histories and Foreclosed Alternatives

A genealogy should not be written as though the path that occurred was the only path available. Historical dependence becomes normatively more informative when it also asks which alternatives were accessible at relevant decision points and why some were abandoned, excluded, or made prohibitively costly.

This does not require reconstructing every counterfactual world. The task is narrower. At selected historical moments, an evaluator may ask whether participants possessed effective alternatives that would have changed the relational trajectory. Where those alternatives were absent, the analysis can ask whether their absence was externally given, institutionally produced, or itself the result of earlier relational decisions.

The resulting genealogy is therefore partly branching. A historical sequence contains points at which different relational futures were more or less accessible. Some branches close because of ordinary con-

straint or uncertainty. Others close because one participant controls resources, information, jurisdiction, or infrastructure. Still others disappear because an institution adopts a rule that later actors inherit as a default. Justice may attach differently to these mechanisms even if they eventually produce the same present state.

Counterfactual reasoning here must remain modest. The paper does not assume that unrealized alternatives can be known with certainty. Nor does it equate the existence of a lost alternative with injustice. The purpose is to identify whether present necessity is genuinely unavoidable or historically produced. A relation that now appears indispensable may have become so through prior choices that concentrated dependency. Conversely, an apparently available alternative may never have been effectively accessible to the participant whose conduct is being judged.

This is one point at which genealogy connects directly to the later treatment of responsibility. Historical evaluation should not impute to earlier actors options that were only visible in retrospect. Effective alternatives must be reconstructed using the information, resources, institutional access, and interpretive capacities available at the relevant time. Otherwise genealogy becomes hindsight moralization rather than historical analysis.

4.7 Inherited Relations and Present Responsibility

Historical dependence creates a difficult normative problem when present actors inherit relations they did not choose. They may benefit from them, be burdened by them, administer them, possess authority within them, or simply find themselves positioned by them. None of these facts alone determines responsibility.

A useful distinction is between responsibility for generating a historical condition and responsibility associated with one's present position within that condition. The first concerns contribution to formation or persistence. The second may arise from current power, role, capacity, dependency, benefit, or institutional authority. Structural accounts of responsibility are relevant because they show how forward-looking obligations can arise without treating every participant as blameworthy for the origin of the structure (Young 2011). Historical-entitlement and rectificatory approaches, by contrast, emphasize how past transactions and wrongs can generate present claims (Nozick 1974; Butt 2008; Waldron 1992).

The present framework does not decide among these theories. Its contribution is to keep the relevant historical and positional facts separable. An inherited advantage can be historically traceable without implying personal culpability. A present office-holder can acquire responsibilities because of current authority even if the office-holder did not create the institution. A beneficiary can lack the practical capacity to repair the structure. A person harmed by a historical process can also occupy a present role that affects others. Genealogical analysis should make these distinctions available rather than compress them into a single label such as beneficiary, victim, perpetrator, or successor.

This is particularly important across generations. Later actors often inherit both material arrangements and institutional narratives about those arrangements. They may receive property, status, debt, jurisdiction, categories of membership, legal precedents, archives, and collective memories. The transmission of interpretation can matter alongside the transmission of resources. A relation may therefore be historically dependent not only because material advantages persist, but because the available account of its history shapes which claims become recognizable in the present.

4.8 Historical Reinterpretation without Temporal Omniscience

Genealogical reconstruction is itself historical. Later interpreters often possess evidence, categories, or normative concepts that were unavailable to earlier participants. This can make a past relation newly intelligible. It can also tempt evaluators to write the history as though later understanding had always been available.

The framework should resist that temptation. Reconstructing the past from a later standpoint does not erase the epistemic conditions under which earlier actors made decisions. A complete justice inquiry may therefore need two distinct reconstructions: one of the relation as later interpreters can now understand

it, and another of the effective epistemic and practical situation available to actors at the historical time being evaluated.

This distinction is especially important for responsibility. A later concept may reveal that a relation involved a form of domination, exclusion, or harm that earlier institutions lacked the vocabulary to describe. That new understanding can matter for acknowledgment, repair, institutional learning, and present reform. It does not automatically establish that every earlier participant had the same capacity to recognize the relation under that description.

Historical reinterpretation can also move in the other direction. Later evidence may weaken a previously dominant narrative, reveal that categories were misapplied, or show that an intervention had effects different from those originally recorded. Genealogy must therefore remain revisable. This is one reason provenance and archival pluralism matter even in a paper focused primarily on justice rather than epistemology.

4.9 Genealogical Compression and Genealogical Excess

The methodological risks of this section can now be stated more precisely. *Genealogical compression* occurs when a present relation is evaluated while excluding historical processes that remain constitutive of its powers, burdens, alternatives, or claims. *Genealogical excess* occurs when historical antecedents are accumulated without a defensible account of why they remain relevant to the judgment.

Both errors can distort justice analysis. Compression can make produced dependencies appear natural, inherited privilege appear ahistorical, or constrained choices appear fully voluntary. Excess can make present actors responsible for indefinitely remote events, prevent later institutional reform from acquiring independent normative significance, or turn every judgment into a total history of society.

A disciplined genealogy therefore needs at least four tests. It should identify a mechanism connecting the past to the present relation. It should specify the normative question for which that mechanism matters. It should preserve uncertainty about contested historical reconstruction. And it should stop when additional historical depth no longer plausibly changes the judgment or the explanation supporting it.

These tests do not yield a mechanical rule. They provide a burden of explanation. Anyone invoking history should be able to say why this history, at this depth, matters to this justice question.

4.10 Implications for Relational Becoming

Relational genealogy changes the object of justice in three ways. First, it reveals that present relational properties can be inherited rather than freshly chosen. Second, it shows that present effective alternatives may themselves be products of earlier transformations. Third, it identifies mechanisms through which earlier decisions continue to shape the future transformability of the relation.

These observations prepare the transition to the next section. Once genealogy has reconstructed how a relation came to its present form, the analysis must distinguish the different kinds of transformation that can occur within its lifecycle. Formation, maintenance, modification, expansion, contraction, suspension, exit, removal, and replacement are not interchangeable events. They involve different participants, authorities, costs, and temporal consequences. A theory of relational becoming therefore needs a vocabulary for the lifecycle of relations as well as for their genealogy.

The main result of this section is methodological. Historical dependence should neither be erased by present-state evaluation nor converted into an unlimited claim that the whole past is always normatively active. Genealogy matters when earlier relational processes remain constitutive of present powers, burdens, alternatives, claims, or rules of transformation. Its role is to expose those inheritances so that substantive theories of justice can evaluate them without mistaking historically generated conditions for timeless background facts.

5 Formation, Maintenance, Modification, Exit, and Removal of Relations

The previous section argued that a present relation can remain dependent on the history through which it was produced. This section turns from genealogy to the lifecycle of the relation itself. A relation is not only something that exists at a given moment. It can be initiated, stabilized, reproduced, altered, expanded, contracted, suspended, exited, terminated, replaced, or allowed to decay. These modes of becoming are analytically distinct because they involve different distributions of authority, burden, dependency, consent, reversibility, and responsibility.

This distinction matters for justice because a relation that is acceptable once formed may nevertheless have been formed unjustly; a relation that was legitimately formed may later be maintained through coercive means; a relation that should be modified may be protected against change by actors who benefit from its present structure; and a relation that can be formally exited may remain effectively inescapable. Conversely, not every change in a relation is normatively desirable. Some relationships are valuable precisely because they are durable. Some forms of removal destroy legitimate expectations, care structures, institutional trust, or public goods. A lifecycle account therefore does not privilege change over stability. Its purpose is to identify the different sites at which justice questions can arise.

The lifecycle vocabulary is also useful because it resists a common compression in normative analysis. Formation, maintenance, modification, and termination are sometimes treated as variants of a single question about whether a relation is just. Yet the normative grounds relevant to each can differ. Consent may be especially important at formation, reliance and expectation during maintenance, proportionality and participation during modification, effective alternatives during exit, and residual responsibility after removal. These differences do not imply a universal checklist. They indicate that the temporal location of a dispute can change what must be examined.

5.1 Relations as Temporally Structured Objects

The term *relation* is used here broadly enough to include interpersonal, legal, institutional, economic, technological, political, ecological, and human–artificial arrangements, provided that the relevant participants, dependencies, powers, or rules can be specified with sufficient clarity. The analysis does not require every relation to possess a sharply defined moment of birth or death. Many relations emerge gradually, overlap with other relations, or persist through changing participants. What matters is that the relation has a temporally extended organization whose formation and transformation can affect the normative positions of those involved.

A lifecycle perspective therefore asks several different questions. How did the relation come into being? What practices, resources, expectations, or infrastructures keep it in place? Who can alter its terms? Which changes require the participation of affected parties? What forms of exit are formally available, and which are effectively usable? What remains after the relation ends? These questions are connected, but they should not be collapsed into a single judgment about the relation’s current desirability.

The lifecycle is also not necessarily linear. A suspended relation can be reactivated. A terminated contractual relation can leave residual obligations. An institution can formally abolish a category while continuing to distribute resources according to records produced under that category. A technological dependency can survive the deletion of the original software through data formats, standards, or infrastructural commitments. The language of lifecycle should therefore be understood as a family of temporal positions rather than a fixed sequence through which every relation must pass.

This temporal plurality becomes especially important when several relations are nested. A worker may exit a particular employment contract without exiting a labor market structure. A state may withdraw an emergency decree while maintaining the administrative infrastructure created under it. A user may leave a digital platform while remaining dependent on standards, identity systems, or records controlled by the platform. The termination of one relation can coexist with the persistence of another relation that inherited its effects. Justice of relational becoming must therefore specify the level at which formation, maintenance, or removal is being evaluated.

5.2 Formation and the Conditions of Entry

Formation concerns the processes through which a relation becomes sufficiently established to organize expectations, resources, rights, duties, dependencies, or opportunities. The relevant normative questions are not exhausted by whether the final relation appears beneficial. Entry conditions can matter independently.

A familiar example is consent. A relation entered under severe coercion, deception, informational asymmetry, or absence of effective alternatives may raise concerns even when later interactions become stable. Yet consent should not be treated as the only relevant criterion. Some relations are not individually chosen: citizenship, kinship, ecological dependence, institutional jurisdiction, inherited legal status, and many infrastructural dependencies are formed without a discrete voluntary act. The justice of formation must therefore examine the mechanisms through which participants are brought into relation rather than presuppose a contractual model.

Several dimensions are especially important. First, formation may distribute initial bargaining power. An actor who controls the terms of entry can determine default rights, information access, modification privileges, or exit costs. Second, formation may create dependencies that later appear natural because the alternatives that existed beforehand have disappeared. Third, formation can allocate interpretive authority by establishing which records, categories, procedures, or interfaces will later count as authoritative. Fourth, formation can create legitimate expectations. Once participants reorganize their lives or institutions around a relation, later transformation may carry burdens that were not present at entry.

Formation can also occur incrementally. A sequence of small accommodations may eventually produce a relation that no participant explicitly authorized as a whole. An organization can accumulate temporary exceptions until they become the effective rule. A household can develop a durable care dependency through repeated practical decisions rather than a formal agreement. A technical service can become infrastructural because alternatives gradually disappear. Incremental formation complicates simple consent-based analysis because there may be no single moment at which the normative character of the relation can be settled.

The central methodological point is that formation should be evaluated as a process with its own distribution of options, information, authority, and burdens. A favorable present state does not automatically erase defects in formation, although later developments can alter the normative significance of those defects. Likewise, unjust formation does not prove that every later aspect of the relation remains unjust. The relation may be repaired, renegotiated, or transformed. Formation history is one object of judgment, not an eternal verdict.

5.3 Maintenance and the Reproduction of Relational Structure

Maintenance concerns the practices and conditions through which a relation continues to exist in a recognizable form. This category is easy to overlook because persistence can appear passive. In many cases, however, maintenance requires ongoing labor, resources, enforcement, recognition, information, care, or institutional support. Even apparent non-intervention can function as maintenance when existing structures depend on the continued refusal to alter them.

The justice of maintenance therefore asks who bears the costs of keeping the relation in place and who benefits from its persistence. A care relation may be valuable yet sustained by an unequal distribution of unpaid labor. A legal regime may provide stability while imposing compliance costs disproportionately on some groups. A technical infrastructure may remain interoperable only because one actor absorbs the cost of adaptation. A political settlement may appear peaceful because dissent is continually excluded from institutional channels. These examples show why maintenance cannot be reduced to the absence of change.

Maintenance can also reproduce historically generated power. Once a relation exists, its rules may generate their own reasons for continuation: investments have been made, expectations formed, records accumulated, skills specialized, identities stabilized, or alternatives abandoned. Such reasons can be legitimate. They can also make a relation difficult to question precisely because prior maintenance has

increased the cost of revision. This is where lifecycle analysis connects to path dependence without treating persistence itself as wrongful.

A further issue concerns maintenance by omission. Suppose an actor possesses authority to revise a harmful institutional rule but repeatedly declines to do so. The normative analysis differs from one in which the actor lacks such authority or lacks adequate knowledge of the harm. Similarly, an infrastructure provider that continues to enforce a technically unnecessary restriction occupies a different position from a participant merely subject to the restriction. Maintenance questions therefore require attention to capacity, knowledge, authority, and effective alternatives.

Maintenance can also be distributed. No single actor may control the relation, yet many actors can contribute to its reproduction through routine practices. Structural injustice literature is relevant here because it shows how ordinary participation can sustain harmful processes without requiring a single intentional wrongdoer (Young 2011). The lifecycle vocabulary adds a temporal specification: the issue is not simply participation in a structure, but the practices through which a relation continues to be reproduced despite changing evidence, capacities, or alternatives.

5.4 Modification and the Politics of Altering Terms

Modification concerns changes that preserve enough continuity for the relation to remain identifiable while altering some of its terms, powers, obligations, boundaries, or resources. Modification is often normatively complex because it combines continuity with disruption. Participants may rely on the old arrangement while also possessing claims to reform it.

The first question is who has the authority to modify the relation. Contractual amendment, constitutional revision, institutional reform, platform redesign, medical treatment, guardianship decisions, and humanitarian intervention all distribute amendment power differently. Technical capacity is not sufficient. An actor can be able to alter a relation without being entitled to do so. Conversely, formal authority can exist without the epistemic or practical capacity required for responsible change.

The second question concerns participation. Some modifications can reasonably be made unilaterally; others require consultation, consent, representation, or collective decision. The relevant standard depends on the relation. A minor administrative update differs from a change that alters identity, dependency, livelihood, legal status, or effective exit. The greater the modification's effect on another participant's relational position, the stronger the case for examining how that participant can contest, refuse, or revise the change.

The third question concerns accumulated reliance. A relation can become unjustly rigid if every expectation generated by the past is treated as a veto against reform. Yet reform can itself become unjust if it ignores legitimate reliance created by long-standing institutional commitments. Lifecycle justice therefore needs to distinguish protected expectations from mere advantages of incumbency. That distinction is substantive and cannot be settled by the temporal framework alone.

Modification can also alter future modification power. A seemingly narrow reform may centralize amendment authority, reduce transparency, change evidential standards, or make later contestation more expensive. This possibility is one reason the paper distinguishes changes in present relational terms from changes in generative rules. A later section will develop that second-order problem directly. At this stage, the important point is that modification should be evaluated both for what it changes now and for the institutional position from which future changes will be made.

5.5 Expansion, Contraction, and Suspension

Not every important relational transformation fits neatly into formation, ordinary modification, or termination. Relations can expand to include new participants, resources, jurisdictions, or domains. They can contract while retaining a core structure. They can also be suspended without being removed.

Expansion raises questions about scope and inclusion. A governance arrangement created for a limited shared resource may gradually extend into adjacent areas. A security measure can widen from a temporary emergency domain to routine administration. A technical standard can become a condition

of market access far beyond its original context. Expansion may solve coordination problems, but it can also generate authority beyond the reasons that originally justified the relation.

Contraction presents the inverse problem. Reducing the scope of a relation can restore autonomy or reduce domination, but it can also withdraw protections, services, recognition, or access on which participants rely. A welfare institution can narrow eligibility; a treaty can reduce coverage; a platform can remove interoperability; a care network can withdraw support. The normative significance depends on the distribution of dependence, expectation, alternatives, and authority rather than on contraction itself.

Suspension is especially useful as an analytical category because it separates temporary non-operation from termination. Emergency pauses, moratoria, provisional stays, temporary separations, and suspended permissions can preserve the possibility of later reactivation while preventing immediate effects. Suspension may therefore be an important response under uncertainty. It can also become a strategy of indefinite limbo if the conditions for review are absent. A just suspension regime may need clarity about duration, review, residual duties, and the position of those whose lives remain organized around the paused relation.

These intermediate modes show why a lifecycle framework should not reduce relational change to a binary choice between preservation and abolition. Many justice problems concern the scale, intensity, duration, or provisional status of a relation.

5.6 Exit as a Distinct Site of Justice

Exit deserves separate treatment because the formal possibility of leaving a relation can differ sharply from effective exit. A worker may be legally free to resign yet lack realistic alternatives. A citizen may possess a right to emigrate while facing prohibitive costs. A digital user may be permitted to leave a platform but lose accumulated data, social ties, or access to essential services. A dependent person may formally refuse care while having no safe substitute. These cases are familiar to capability and domination theories, but lifecycle analysis locates them specifically at the termination boundary of a relation.

The justice of exit concerns at least four questions. The first is availability: does an exit route exist in law, policy, technical architecture, or practice? The second is accessibility: can the participant actually use it given resources, knowledge, safety, and alternatives? The third is cost: what must be surrendered to leave, and are those losses themselves produced by the relation? The fourth is aftermath: what obligations, records, liabilities, dependencies, or vulnerabilities persist after exit?

Exit can also be unequally distributed. One participant may be able to leave cheaply while another remains locked into the relation. This asymmetry can alter bargaining power even if exit is never exercised. Republican theories of domination are relevant because dependence on another's discretionary power can matter independently of actual interference (Pettit 1997). In lifecycle terms, unequal exit capacity can shape the relation throughout its duration, not only at the moment of termination.

There is also a danger of treating exit as a substitute for justice within the relation. "You can leave" does not resolve every complaint about unfair terms, especially where the relation provides access to essential goods or where exit costs were generated by the relation itself. Conversely, a theory that focuses only on improving internal terms can understate the value of being able to refuse continued participation. Voice, reform, and exit are different modes of response and may need to coexist.

A further problem is collective exit. Some relations cannot be exited individually without changing the conditions of others. Withdrawal from a shared infrastructure, ecological arrangement, treaty regime, or collective institution may impose costs on remaining participants. Exit rights therefore sometimes interact with responsibilities concerning shared conditions. The temporal framework does not settle those conflicts, but it prevents individual exit from being treated as normatively isolated from the relation it leaves behind.

5.7 Removal, Termination, and the Ethics of Ending Relations

Removal concerns the deliberate ending of a relation or relational structure. Termination can be emancipatory when it ends domination, coercion, exclusion, or an obsolete institutional arrangement. It can also be destructive when it eliminates support, recognition, trust, livelihood, or a valuable form of association. Justice therefore cannot presume either preservation or abolition.

One question concerns authority to terminate. A participant may possess a personal right to end an interpersonal relation while lacking authority to dissolve an institution on which many others depend. A government may possess legal power to abolish an agency while remaining constrained by rights, expectations, or constitutional procedures. An infrastructure owner may be technically able to deactivate a system while bearing obligations toward dependent users. The appropriate locus of termination authority depends on the relation's structure and effects.

A second question concerns timing. Immediate termination may prevent continuing harm but can also create acute transition costs. Gradual removal can reduce disruption while prolonging an objectionable relation. Moratoria, staged transitions, compensation, replacement institutions, and temporary safeguards are therefore part of the ethics of ending, not merely implementation details.

A third question concerns residual effects. Ending a relation rarely restores a pre-relational baseline. Skills can be lost, resources redistributed, identities changed, records preserved, expectations formed, dependencies created, and environments altered. A terminated relation can continue to shape future options. Removal should therefore be evaluated partly through what remains after formal termination.

This point is particularly important for relations produced through injustice. Abolishing an unjust institution does not automatically repair the inequalities it generated. Historical justice and rectification debates make this clear in property and political contexts (Nozick 1974; Waldron 1992; Butt 2008). A lifecycle framework generalizes the issue: removal ends one mode of relation but may leave a residual distribution of advantages, burdens, and capacities that requires separate evaluation.

5.8 Replacement and Relational Succession

Many relations do not simply disappear; they are replaced. A legal regime is superseded by another, a platform migrates users to a new architecture, an institution is reorganized, a care arrangement is transferred, or a political order is reconstructed after conflict. Replacement raises a succession problem: which features of the old relation are inherited, repudiated, compensated, or preserved?

Transitional justice provides an especially important analogue because regime change does not create a morally empty starting point. New institutions inherit victims, records, expectations, personnel, legal categories, property distributions, and contested narratives (Teitel 2000). The same structure can appear on smaller scales. Organizational restructuring can inherit discriminatory records. A new technical system can reproduce old access hierarchies through migrated data. A reformed contract can preserve dependencies created under earlier terms.

Replacement therefore requires more than comparison between an old and new state. The transition itself can allocate burdens and authority. Who designs the successor relation? Which participants can contest the migration? What happens to accumulated claims? Which records remain binding? Are prior dependencies reproduced under new language? These are questions of relational succession.

A replacement relation can also create apparent novelty while preserving the old generative structure. Renaming an institution or rewriting formal rules may leave control, effective alternatives, and amendment power substantially unchanged. Conversely, a successor relation can alter deep structures while preserving surface continuity. Lifecycle analysis therefore needs to distinguish nominal replacement from substantive transformation.

5.9 Lifecycle Mismatch and Normative Misdiagnosis

A useful implication of the lifecycle framework is that normative interventions can fail when they target the wrong phase of the relation. A formation problem can be mistaken for a maintenance problem; a

maintenance problem can be treated as though individual exit were sufficient; a modification dispute can be framed as a question of total abolition; a termination problem can be handled through minor procedural reform.

This can be called *lifecycle mismatch*. The term does not describe a moral wrong by itself. It identifies a diagnostic failure in which the proposed remedy does not correspond to the temporal site at which the relevant relational problem is being generated or reproduced.

For example, improving the fairness of current procedures may not address an exclusion embedded in initial entry conditions. Expanding exit rights may do little if the primary problem is a monopoly over the successor infrastructure. Compensation after removal may be insufficient if the main issue is continuing control over records or future amendment rules. Conversely, reopening formation questions indefinitely can destabilize legitimate relations whose present terms have been independently reauthorized. The lifecycle location of the problem matters for the proportionality and relevance of the response.

This diagnosis also helps discipline the framework. The purpose is not to multiply categories for their own sake. The categories are useful when they change what evidence, actors, authority, or remedy must be considered. If formation, maintenance, and modification make no difference to the judgment in a particular case, the analysis should remain simpler.

5.10 Responsibility across the Lifecycle

Different lifecycle positions can distribute responsibility differently. Those who formed a relation may no longer control it. Those who maintain it may have inherited rather than chosen its terms. Those who modify it may be constrained by earlier commitments. Those who terminate it may bear responsibility for transition costs they did not create. A single label such as “responsible actor” can therefore obscure the temporal structure of agency.

It is useful to distinguish, in prose rather than by a single formula, responsibility for creating a relation, responsibility for maintaining it, responsibility for failing to revise it, responsibility for modifying it, responsibility for constraining exit, responsibility for terminating it, and responsibility for the conditions left afterward. These can fall on different actors and be grounded in different reasons.

The distinction also prevents retrospective overreach. A present actor can inherit control over a relation without inheriting the same degree or kind of responsibility for its original formation. At the same time, inherited control can create new responsibilities concerning maintenance, reform, or repair. Young’s social connection model is again relevant because forward-looking responsibility can arise from present participation in structures that no current actor individually created (Young 2011). Lifecycle analysis adds a temporal differentiation among the forms that such participation can take.

Responsibility also depends on effective alternatives. An administrator compelled by law to maintain a rule occupies a different position from one who possesses broad discretion to revise it. A participant who cannot safely exit a relation should not be evaluated as though continued participation were fully voluntary. These questions connect lifecycle analysis to the later treatment of agency, exit, and generated effects.

5.11 Lifecycle Justice without a Presumption for Change

The expansion of justice across relational formation, maintenance, modification, exit, and removal can easily be misunderstood as a theory favoring maximum revisability. That is not the argument. Durable relations can protect trust, rights, care, coordination, and long-term projects. Stable institutions can shield participants from arbitrary change. Some forms of closure are conditions of agency rather than obstacles to it.

The relevant question is therefore not whether a relation is easy to change. It is how the conditions of stability and transformation are distributed, justified, and contestable. Stability secured through reciprocal commitment differs from stability secured through unilateral dependency. Difficulty of exit can be appropriate in some fiduciary, custodial, or public arrangements and oppressive in others. Rapid modifi-

cation can be necessary in emergencies and destabilizing when it bypasses legitimate expectations. The lifecycle vocabulary identifies these questions without supplying one universal preference among them.

Nor does the framework assume that every relation should be governed through explicit negotiation. Informal, emergent, customary, ecological, and affective relations may not admit a contractual lifecycle. The same analytical questions can still be asked with suitable caution: how the relation became established, what sustains it, how its participants can alter or refuse it, and what follows when it ends. The answers may be partial, and the appropriate normative vocabulary may differ across domains.

The principal contribution of this section is therefore to disaggregate the temporal object of relational justice. Formation, maintenance, modification, expansion, contraction, suspension, exit, removal, and replacement can each constitute distinct sites of evaluation. Their normative significance depends on substantive theories of justice and on the particular relation under study. The benefit of the lifecycle framework is that it prevents a present-state verdict from silently substituting for judgments about how the relation began, how it persists, who can change it, who can leave it, and what remains when it ends.

The next section turns to another distinction that becomes visible once lifecycle analysis is in place: the difference among what an actor intended, what the actor actually did, and the relational effects that were generated. A theory of relational becoming needs this separation because justice can attach differently to intention, implementation, and consequence, especially when interventions alter dependencies or institutional capacities beyond what their designers anticipated.

6 Intention, Action, and Generated Relational Effect

A theory of relational becoming needs to distinguish at least three objects that are often compressed into a single description: what an actor intended, what the actor actually did, and what relational effects were generated. The distinction is elementary in one sense. Moral and legal thought have long separated intention, conduct, causation, consequence, negligence, and responsibility. Yet the distinction becomes especially important once the object of justice is not a discrete event alone but a relation whose structure can persist, reproduce itself, and alter the conditions of later action.

The present section develops this separation as an analytical discipline. It does not propose a complete theory of action or moral responsibility. Nor does it claim that intention is irrelevant, that consequences exhaust justice, or that every relational effect can be attributed to the actor nearest to its production. The narrower claim is that justice of relational becoming can misidentify its object when it moves too quickly from benevolent intention to justified action, from justified action to justified result, or from harmful result to personal culpability. Each transition requires independent argument.

6.1 Three Objects of Evaluation

An intention concerns what an actor is trying to do, the reasons under which the actor understands the action, and the purpose that organizes the actor's practical orientation. A performed action concerns what was actually implemented under concrete institutional, material, and informational conditions. A generated relational effect concerns the change in a relation that was causally produced or materially contributed to by that action within the relevant background conditions.

These objects can align. An actor may intend to create a protection mechanism, implement the mechanism substantially as planned, and generate the intended protective relation. But alignment cannot be assumed. A protective intention can be implemented through procedures that create dependence. A formally temporary intervention can generate durable administrative authority. A measure designed to expand access can generate new gatekeeping power. An attempt to equalize treatment can make a previously visible difference institutionally invisible. The normative assessment of the intention, the implementation, and the generated relation can therefore diverge.

This divergence should not be represented as a simple hierarchy in which effects always override intentions. Intention remains relevant to agency, justification, excuse, blame, and responsibility. Implementation matters because plans acquire institutional and material form only through actual conduct.

Generated effects matter because justice concerns what relations people inhabit, not merely what actors hoped to produce. The point is analytical separation rather than lexical priority.

6.2 Intention as a Situated Object

Intentions are themselves historically and relationally situated. An actor acts through available concepts, information, institutional roles, practical alternatives, and inherited expectations. A regulator who intends to protect a population may possess a very different evidential environment from a later evaluator who has access to the consequences of the policy. A humanitarian actor may work under severe uncertainty, compressed time, incomplete communication, and asymmetric risk. An institution may formulate an intention through collective procedures rather than through a single person's mental state.

For this reason, intention should not be reconstructed only from retrospective outcome. A harmful effect does not demonstrate that harm was intended. Conversely, a public declaration of benevolent purpose does not establish that the relevant intention was benevolent, coherent, or complete. Institutional actors can have multiple partially conflicting objectives. Publicly stated reasons can coexist with strategic incentives. Organizational routines can produce actions whose practical direction is not well captured by any single explicit intention.

A relational account should therefore treat intention as an evidentially reconstructed object. Relevant evidence may include deliberative records, policy documents, design specifications, internal communication, institutional mandates, contemporaneous warnings, and the practical choices made when alternatives were available. The aim is not to discover an inaccessible inner essence of agency. It is to understand the reasons and purposes under which the action was organized sufficiently well to evaluate the relation between intention, implementation, and effect.

This situated view also limits hindsight moralism. Later observers may identify consequences or relational mechanisms that were not reasonably available to the actor at the time. A later conceptual vocabulary can make an earlier harm newly legible without proving that the earlier actor possessed the same interpretive resources. Justice of relational effect and responsibility for relational effect must therefore remain distinct questions.

6.3 Performed Action and the Problem of Implementation

Between intention and effect lies implementation. This middle object is often compressed because an intervention is described by the policy, decision, or declared action rather than by what was actually done. Yet relational consequences are frequently produced by the details of implementation.

A rule can be enacted but weakly enforced. A protection mechanism can exist formally while access costs make it unusable. A consultation procedure can be announced while the timing, language, or evidentiary requirements exclude the participants most affected. A system designed to distribute authority can be implemented through a technical architecture that recentralizes control. The intended institutional form and the performed action therefore need not coincide.

Implementation analysis asks how a decision was translated into conduct, procedure, infrastructure, allocation, communication, and enforcement. It attends to who acted, which resources were mobilized, what discretion existed, how exceptions were handled, what information was available, and which parts of the plan were modified during execution. This level is especially important for institutional action because the actor who authorizes a measure, the actors who implement it, and the actors who maintain the resulting arrangement may be different.

The distinction also prevents a common form of exculpation. An institution cannot always answer evidence of harmful relational effects merely by restating the benevolent purpose of the policy. If the harm was generated through predictable implementation practices, the justice inquiry must examine those practices. At the same time, implementation failure should not automatically be attributed to the designer when intervening actors, material constraints, sabotage, unforeseen events, or later modifications materially changed the action performed.

6.4 Generated Relational Effect

The term *generated relational effect* refers to a change in a relation that is causally connected to an action or omission and is relevant to the justice inquiry. The effect can concern dependency, authority, access, exit, expectation, resource control, recognition, informational asymmetry, institutional position, or another relational feature. It can also concern the creation of a new relation or the destruction of an existing one.

The adjective *generated* is important because the effect is not treated as a free-standing outcome. It is produced within a relational field. The same performed action can have different effects under different background conditions. A subsidy can expand effective choice in one institutional environment and deepen dependence in another. A disclosure requirement can increase accountability where participants possess contestation resources and increase vulnerability where powerful actors control the downstream use of disclosed information. A temporary emergency power can expire cleanly in one constitutional setting and become a precedent for permanent expansion in another.

Accordingly, generated effects are relationally mediated. Their analysis requires attention to the pre-existing state, institutional context, available alternatives, material dependencies, interpretive infrastructures, and the responses of other actors. This does not mean that causal explanation must become unlimited. It means that the justice inquiry should identify the background conditions without which the relevant effect would be misunderstood.

The relational effect should also be distinguished from a simple welfare consequence. A measure may improve short-term welfare while changing who controls future decisions. It may reduce immediate risk while narrowing exit. It may distribute resources more equally while making participation conditional on a more intrusive classification system. Conversely, a measure can impose short-term costs while expanding effective independence or dismantling a coercive dependency. Justice of relational becoming therefore requires a vocabulary capable of describing structural changes that are not reducible to aggregate benefit or loss.

6.5 Immediate Effects and the Threshold of Relational Significance

Not every consequence of an action should be elevated into a relational effect relevant to justice. Actions produce countless causal changes. A useful inquiry requires criteria for selecting which changes matter.

Three considerations are especially important. First, the effect should alter a relation, a relational position, or the conditions under which a relation can be formed, maintained, contested, or exited. Second, the alteration should be sufficiently connected to the action under examination that causal attribution is not merely speculative. Third, the alteration should matter under the normative question being asked. A justice inquiry concerned with domination will select different relational features from one concerned with recognition, capability, historical entitlement, or procedural fairness.

This threshold prevents the concept of generated effect from becoming analytically total. The fact that an intervention indirectly changes social expectations does not by itself establish that every downstream expectation belongs in the justice assessment. Relevance must be argued. The same discipline applies to omission. Failure to act can contribute to the maintenance of an existing relation, but omission becomes a normatively relevant generated effect only when the actor's position, capacity, role, knowledge, and alternatives make the omission an appropriate object of inquiry.

The threshold is therefore purpose-sensitive rather than purely causal. Justice of relational becoming needs enough causal breadth to capture institutional and relational effects that ordinary event descriptions miss, but enough discipline to avoid treating the entire future as the consequence of every present action.

6.6 Foreseeability and the Difference between Effect and Responsibility

Generated relational effect and responsibility for that effect should be kept separate. This separation is consistent with structural approaches that distinguish causal participation from fault and that distribute

political responsibility according to factors such as power, privilege, interest, and collective capacity (Young 2011). It is also necessary for ordinary fairness in attribution.

An effect can be ethically serious even when no actor could reasonably have foreseen it. In such a case, the effect may justify repair, institutional learning, or redesign without supporting blame for the original action. Conversely, an actor can be seriously responsible for exposing others to a relational risk even if the worst effect fortunately does not materialize. Justice of effects and responsibility of actors therefore answer different questions.

Foreseeability is itself graded and historically situated. An effect may have been explicitly predicted, inferable from available evidence, visible only to specialized experts, weakly imaginable, or conceptually unavailable. Institutions also differ in their duties to investigate. A private individual and a public regulator can possess different obligations to anticipate downstream effects. An actor who controls a high-risk infrastructure can be required to inquire more extensively than an actor with marginal involvement.

The analysis should also distinguish initial foreseeability from later notice. An effect that was unforeseeable at the moment of action may become visible during implementation or maintenance. Continuing the arrangement after warning can create a different responsibility from initiating it without such knowledge. This temporal distinction is one reason lifecycle analysis from the previous section matters for agency. Responsibility can migrate as evidence, capacity, and control change.

6.7 Causal Contribution without Causal Monism

Relational effects are often multiply caused. An intervention can generate dependency only because background law, resource scarcity, infrastructure, institutional practice, and participant responses combine in a particular way. A simplistic causal model can therefore place excessive responsibility on the actor nearest to the visible effect or, in the opposite direction, dissolve responsibility into an indefinitely distributed structure.

The present framework does not attempt to solve the philosophy of causation. It adopts a practical requirement: claims about generated relational effect should identify the contribution being attributed and the background conditions that materially mediate it. Where multiple actors or institutions contribute, the analysis should resist treating contribution as identical to responsibility.

This matters especially for structural injustice. Young's social connection model shows why participation in a structural process can ground forward-looking political responsibility even when no single participant intentionally produces the injustice (Young 2011). A generative relational analysis adds a temporal question: which actors contributed to forming, maintaining, modifying, or failing to revise the relation at different moments? This can help locate responsibility without pretending that the structure has a single author.

Causal plurality also matters for repair. If several institutions jointly generated a dependency, effective repair may require coordinated transformation rather than identification of one culpable actor. Conversely, distributing causal contribution broadly should not obscure concentrated control. One actor may be only one contributor among many while possessing disproportionate authority to alter the relation once the harm is known.

6.8 Institutional and Collective Action

The separation of intention, action, and effect becomes more difficult when the relevant actor is collective. Institutions can persist across changes in personnel. Decisions can be produced through procedures that no individual fully controls. Implementation can be delegated. Effects can emerge from routines rather than explicit plans. A relational justice framework must therefore avoid importing a model of individual intention into collective settings without modification.

Institutional intention can sometimes be reconstructed from authorized purposes, official decisions, budgets, mandates, and design choices. Yet these sources may conflict. A ministry can pursue efficiency and inclusion simultaneously. A corporation can adopt a safety policy while rewarding practices that undermine it. A humanitarian organization can commit to local autonomy while operating through funding

structures that centralize decision-making. The relational effect can therefore reveal tensions inside the institution rather than simply deviation from a single coherent intention.

Collective action also raises questions of temporal continuity. The officials responsible for creating an arrangement may leave before its effects become visible. Successor institutions can inherit both benefits and burdens. Responsibility can then attach differently to originators, maintainers, beneficiaries, supervisors, and actors who acquire later capacity to revise the arrangement. These distinctions prepare the later analysis of historical responsibility and repair.

The important point is not that institutions possess intentions in exactly the same way persons do. It is that justice analysis needs a vocabulary capable of separating institutional purpose, performed institutional conduct, and relational effects even when agency is distributed.

6.9 Feedback, Adaptation, and Endogenous Response

Generated effects are not always passive consequences. Participants respond to interventions. They adapt, resist, comply, reinterpret, exit, exploit loopholes, or reorganize around new rules. These responses can become part of the relational effect.

A policy intended to distribute opportunity can induce strategic behavior that changes access. A monitoring system can alter the behavior it measures. A legal remedy can cause institutions to redesign contracts, classifications, or procedures. A technological safeguard can produce workarounds that redistribute rather than remove risk. Such cases complicate the distinction between action and effect because the effect is co-produced through later responses.

The appropriate conclusion is not that the originating actor controls every adaptive response. Rather, the justice inquiry should distinguish effects that are reasonably connected to the intervention from independent developments that merely follow it in time. Where feedback was foreseeable or structurally induced, it belongs more strongly in the assessment. Where later actors introduce genuinely new aims or mechanisms, responsibility should be distributed accordingly.

This adaptive dimension is also relevant to generative rules. Some interventions alter incentives, information, or authority in ways that change how later actors respond. Section 8 will examine such second-order transformation directly. The present section establishes the agency-side prerequisite: a generated relational effect can include patterned responses that the action makes more likely without treating every later event as intended by the original actor.

6.10 Correction, Learning, and Responsibility after the Effect

Justice of relational becoming should not freeze responsibility at the moment of initial action. Once an unintended relational effect becomes visible, new options arise. Actors may acknowledge the effect, investigate it, mitigate it, compensate affected parties, redesign the arrangement, distribute new authority, or refuse correction.

This creates a second layer of agency. The original effect can have been innocent or excusable while the later refusal to respond is not. Conversely, an actor initially responsible for a harmful effect can reduce later injustice through timely repair. Institutional learning therefore belongs within the temporal analysis of responsibility.

The distinction is particularly important for novel technologies, emergency governance, and heterogeneous relations in which the relevant effects may be difficult to predict before deployment. A demanding standard of perfect foresight would make experimentation impossible. A permissive standard that ignores later evidence would make affected participants bear the costs of institutional learning. A more defensible approach distinguishes uncertainty before action from responsibility after new evidence becomes available.

This point also connects to re-cognizability. If an institution preserves records, reasons, implementation histories, and evidence of effects, later actors are better positioned to identify and correct relational harm. If the institution destroys or obscures those traces, correction becomes more difficult. The justice

of action therefore interfaces with the justice of institutional memory, though the latter will be developed elsewhere in the broader research programme.

6.11 Evidential Reconstruction of Generated Effects

Generated relational effects are often reconstructed after the fact. This creates an epistemic problem. An evaluator may know the present relation but not which part of it was produced by the action under study. Post hoc narratives can overstate causal coherence. Institutions can selectively document successes while omitting dependency, displacement, or exit costs. Affected participants can possess knowledge unavailable to formal records.

A careful reconstruction should therefore preserve distinctions among observed change, causal inference, normative interpretation, and responsibility attribution. Longitudinal records, counterfactual comparison, participant testimony, institutional documentation, and evidence from comparable cases can all contribute, but none automatically resolves the question.

The evidential standard should also reflect the type of claim. Demonstrating that an action was followed by a changed relational pattern requires less than establishing that the action caused the pattern, and both require less than establishing culpable responsibility. Keeping these claims separate reduces the risk that moral language substitutes for causal analysis or that causal uncertainty is used to deny plainly observable relational change.

This evidential discipline is especially important when effects are politically contested. Actors who benefit from the resulting relation may characterize it as an unintended externality or unrelated social change. Opponents may characterize every later disadvantage as generated by the original intervention. Justice of relational becoming needs a reconstruction robust enough to resist both forms of inflation.

6.12 Limits of the Separation

The three-part distinction developed here is analytical rather than metaphysical. In practice, intention, action, and effect can overlap. Intentions can change during implementation. Actors can revise plans in response to emerging effects. Some actions are defined partly by their intended object, while some institutional effects are built into the very procedure performed. The framework should not force clean separation where the case does not support it.

Nor should generated effect become a new consequentialism by default. The fact that relational effects matter does not imply that justice is exhausted by those effects. Rights, procedures, promises, recognition, historical claims, legitimate authority, and constraints on intervention can remain decisive even where a different action would have generated a better relational state under another criterion.

The main contribution of the distinction is therefore diagnostic. It prevents one favorable dimension from silently doing the work of the others. Good intention does not settle implementation. Correct implementation does not settle generated effect. Harmful effect does not settle culpability. Lack of culpability does not make the effect normatively irrelevant. Each proposition requires its own argument.

Section 7 extends this analysis to immediate and long-horizon relational consequences, including the problem of how far a justice inquiry can reasonably extend into an open future.

7 Immediate and Long-Horizon Relational Consequences

Justice of relational becoming requires attention not only to what an action generates, but also to when its consequences become visible, how long they persist, and which later relational possibilities they alter. Section 6 separated intention, performed action, and generated relational effect. The present section adds a temporal dimension to that analysis. A relational effect can be immediate yet temporary, delayed yet durable, cumulative rather than discrete, or initially beneficial while changing the conditions under which later actors can exercise agency, contest authority, or exit a relation.

The point is not that long-term consequences always matter more than immediate ones. Urgent protection, relief, rescue, or stabilization can be morally decisive. Nor does a longer horizon automatically produce a more accurate or more just evaluation. The future is uncertain, causal attribution weakens with distance, and an indefinitely expanding time horizon can make responsibility impossible to delimit. The narrower claim is that relational justice should make the choice of temporal horizon explicit rather than allowing short-term visibility to determine what counts as consequence.

This section therefore treats temporal horizon as an analytical decision that itself requires justification. It develops distinctions among immediate and delayed effects, persistence and reversibility, cumulative and threshold effects, adaptive and path-dependent consequences, and changes in future effective alternatives. It then considers how justice inquiry can remain prospective without pretending to know an open future.

7.1 Temporal Horizon as an Analytical Choice

Every evaluation of consequence operates within a temporal window. An emergency intervention may be judged over hours or days. A welfare institution may be evaluated over years. A constitutional arrangement, infrastructure project, or educational reform may generate consequences across generations. The relevant horizon depends partly on the object under examination and partly on the normative question being asked.

This choice is easy to hide. Institutions often report consequences at the interval for which data are available, budgets are audited, political mandates are renewed, or organizational performance is measured. A short reporting cycle can make rapid outputs highly visible while rendering dependency, institutional displacement, erosion of local capacity, or changes in exit conditions difficult to detect. Conversely, an insistence on very long-term consequences can obscure urgent present harms by treating them as temporary costs within an imagined future improvement.

Justice of relational becoming should therefore ask why a particular temporal window is being used. The question is not merely methodological. The chosen horizon can redistribute normative visibility. A relation that appears beneficial at one temporal scale may look very different when maintenance costs, adaptive responses, cumulative exclusions, or delayed dependencies are included. The horizon is thus part of the evaluative framing rather than a neutral container around it.

No universal horizon follows from this observation. Different claims can require different windows. Immediate bodily danger may demand a short horizon. Institutional dependency may require a longer one. Historical dispossession may require reconstruction across a much longer period. A defensible analysis can therefore use multiple horizons rather than forcing every consequence into one temporal frame.

7.2 Immediate Benefit and Relational Aftermath

A common difficulty arises when an intervention produces an immediate improvement while also altering the relation in which future decisions will occur. Emergency protection can reduce present risk while concentrating authority. Financial assistance can relieve hardship while creating durable dependency on a single gatekeeper. A technological safeguard can lower immediate exposure while normalizing a monitoring architecture that remains after the original danger has passed.

These cases should not be reduced to a simple contrast between short-term good and long-term bad. The immediate benefit can be real and normatively important. The longer-horizon cost can also be real. The justice problem lies in evaluating both without allowing one temporal register to erase the other.

The relational aftermath is especially important when a temporary intervention leaves behind institutional capacities that are easier to preserve than to dismantle. Emergency procedures can become precedents. Exceptional databases can become routine administrative infrastructure. Temporary restrictions can alter expectations about legitimate authority. These consequences do not make emergency action unjust by definition. They do, however, show why expiration, review, and dismantling conditions can be part of the justice of the original intervention.

This problem is closely related to path dependence. Institutions and policies can become increasingly difficult to reverse as complementary practices, investments, expectations, and constituencies accumulate (Pierson 2000; Mahoney 2000). A relational account adds a normative question to this explanatory insight: when an action is likely to alter the cost of later reversal, who bears the burden of that reduced reversibility and who gains from it?

7.3 Persistence, Reversibility, and Residual Structure

The duration of an effect matters, but duration alone is not sufficient. A temporary harm can be severe. A durable benefit can be welcome. More analytically useful is the distinction between persistence and reversibility.

A persistent relational effect continues after the initiating action has ended. A reversible effect can, at least in principle, be undone or substantially repaired without reproducing the original harm at comparable scale. These properties can diverge. Some effects persist only because no actor has chosen to reverse them. Others become practically irreversible because resources, knowledge, institutional capacity, or alternative pathways have been lost.

For example, a temporary exclusion from a programme may have lasting effects if it interrupts education, destroys a livelihood, or removes a participant from a network that cannot later be reconstructed. A short period of centralized control may permanently weaken local institutions if expertise and authority migrate away and are not rebuilt. Conversely, a long-lasting arrangement may remain highly revisable if amendment procedures, exit options, distributed knowledge, and alternative institutions remain intact.

Justice analysis should therefore ask not only how long a consequence lasts but what is required to alter it later. Reversibility has distributional structure. One actor may experience an arrangement as easily revisable because it controls the relevant infrastructure, while another experiences the same arrangement as effectively fixed. The cost of reversal, the authority to initiate it, and the capacity to survive the transition can all be unequally distributed.

Reversibility should not become an overriding norm. Some just arrangements should be stable. Rights protection can require durable commitments that are intentionally difficult to dismantle. The relevant question is whether rigidity or flexibility is justified in relation to the interest being protected, the risks of abuse, and the distribution of power over future change.

7.4 Delayed, Latent, and Cumulative Consequences

Some relational consequences are delayed. A policy can alter incentives or expectations without producing an observable institutional change until much later. A classification practice can gradually reshape who enters a profession. A resource allocation can weaken an institution over several budget cycles. A surveillance system can produce behavioral adaptation before any formal sanction occurs.

Delayed effects create evidential difficulties. The longer the interval between action and consequence, the more intervening causes appear. Justice analysis should therefore resist retrospective narratives in which every later condition is attributed to an earlier decision. At the same time, temporal distance should not be used to dismiss effects that operate through known mechanisms of accumulation.

Cumulative consequences are particularly important. An individual decision can appear minor while repeated decisions generate a significant relational pattern. Small asymmetries in access, review, funding, or recognition can accumulate into durable positional differences. No single event may be sufficient to explain the result. The object of analysis becomes the repeated process and the conditions that allow the process to reproduce itself.

This is one reason structural injustice cannot always be understood through isolated acts. Young's account of structural processes emphasizes how many actors can participate in producing unjust outcomes without any single action being sufficient to generate the structure (Young 2011). A temporal relational analysis adds that the injustice may become visible only after repeated interactions have sedimented into durable dependencies or differentiated option spaces.

Threshold effects create another complication. A relation can absorb repeated changes without obvious transformation until a critical point is reached. Institutional trust can erode gradually and then collapse. A community can tolerate incremental resource loss until a livelihood becomes unviable. Exit can remain formally possible until accumulated costs make it practically unavailable. Such cases caution against evaluating each increment only by its local effect.

7.5 Adaptive Responses and Endogenous Consequence

Participants do not remain fixed while consequences unfold. They adapt. They learn new rules, reorganize strategies, develop workarounds, resist, comply, exit, or invest in the new institutional environment. Long-horizon consequence therefore includes responses generated within the relation itself.

This does not mean that every later adaptation should be attributed to the initiating actor. Participants possess agency, and later actors can introduce new causes. The analytical task is to distinguish consequences plausibly induced by the relational change from developments that merely occur afterward.

Adaptation can amplify an intervention. A new subsidy can produce an industry organized around continued subsidy. A ranking system can cause organizations to optimize for the metric rather than the underlying goal. A regulatory category can encourage actors to redesign themselves to fit the category. A platform rule can generate new forms of dependency because complementary services, reputations, and social practices reorganize around it.

Adaptation can also weaken or reverse an intervention. Participants can create alternative institutions, build counter-infrastructures, reinterpret a rule, or develop new forms of exit. Long-horizon analysis should therefore avoid deterministic assumptions. Path dependence is not fate. Historical sequences can constrain later possibilities without eliminating agency (Mahoney 2000).

The justice question concerns the distribution of adaptive capacity. Some participants possess capital, information, mobility, legal representation, or technical expertise that allows rapid adjustment. Others bear transition costs they cannot absorb. The same institutional change can therefore expand effective options for one group while sharply reducing them for another.

7.6 Future Effective Alternatives

One of the most important long-horizon consequences concerns future effective alternatives. Section 3 introduced effective option spaces as part of the object of relational justice. The present issue is temporal: an action can leave current welfare or formal rights largely unchanged while altering what participants will later be able to do.

A contract can preserve nominal exit while increasing switching costs. A public programme can improve current provision while eliminating alternative providers. A technological ecosystem can offer immediate convenience while making future interoperability difficult. A legal reform can expand one right while concentrating procedural authority in a way that makes later contestation more costly.

Capability theory is relevant here because it shifts attention from resources alone to substantive opportunities to do and be (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2006). A generative relational analysis adds a question about the future production of those opportunities. Which current actions expand, preserve, narrow, or redistribute the conditions under which later capabilities can be exercised?

This should not be converted into a universal requirement to maximize future option space. Some options can justifiably be restricted. Protective institutions often work by closing dangerous possibilities. Binding commitments can make valuable coordination possible precisely because they reduce later discretion. Justice therefore concerns the reasons, authority, distribution, and revisability of constraint rather than openness in the abstract.

The relevant concern is especially strong when one actor acquires unilateral control over the future alternatives of others. Pettit's account of domination is useful because dependence can be objectionable even when power is not continuously exercised; the capacity for arbitrary interference can structure the relation in advance (Pettit 1997). Long-horizon relational justice should therefore attend to latent control, not only realized interference.

7.7 Second-Order Institutional Consequences

Some actions alter institutions that later govern other actions. Their consequences are therefore second-order. A reform can change who has authority to make future rules, how disputes are reviewed, what evidence is admissible, or which institutions survive as alternatives. These consequences are more than downstream outcomes because they affect the machinery through which later relational change occurs.

This point prepares Section 8, which will examine transformation of generative rules directly. For present purposes, it is enough to observe that a policy can be successful with respect to its immediate target while producing a less desirable institutional environment for later decisions. Conversely, a costly reform can improve the fairness or contestability of future decision-making even before it produces visible substantive benefits.

Second-order effects are often difficult to evaluate because they are mediated through many later actions. Yet they are also among the most durable consequences of constitutional design, emergency governance, privatization, platform architecture, institutional merger, and large-scale administrative reform. Ignoring them can make a justice analysis systematically short-sighted.

The relevant questions include who gains future rule-making authority, who loses veto or exit capacity, which institutions become dependent on which resources, and how easily later actors can revise the arrangement. These questions concern institutional position rather than prediction of every future event.

7.8 Urgency without Short-Termism

A concern with long horizons can become dangerous if it weakens the force of urgent present claims. Institutions have often justified present suffering by reference to future development, stability, security, modernization, or collective benefit. A theory of relational becoming should not provide a new vocabulary for repeating that pattern.

Urgency and temporal depth should therefore be distinguished. An immediate threat can justify rapid action even when long-term effects remain uncertain. The requirement is not to solve the entire future before acting. It is to avoid treating urgency as a reason to erase foreseeable downstream consequences altogether.

One practical response is staged action. An institution can act quickly while limiting duration, preserving evidence, distributing review authority, and scheduling reconsideration. Temporary measures can contain explicit expiration conditions. Emergency powers can be accompanied by independent oversight. Experimental policies can preserve exit and comparison conditions. These devices do not guarantee justice, but they reduce the need to choose between paralysis and irreversible commitment.

This temporal design principle is particularly important under uncertainty. The more uncertain the long-horizon effects, the stronger the case can become for preserving the capacity to revise, provided that revisability does not undermine the urgent purpose of the intervention. Again, this is not a universal maxim. Some actions cannot be provisional, and some harms cannot be repaired later. The appropriate degree of reversibility depends on the stakes and structure of the case.

7.9 Long-Horizon Uncertainty and the Limits of Prediction

The future is open. Any framework that treats distant consequences as fully knowable would replace short-termism with speculative overconfidence. Long-horizon justice therefore requires epistemic restraint.

Several kinds of uncertainty matter. Future behavior can change. Institutions can be redesigned. Technologies can transform available options. New concepts can make previously invisible harms legible. Political coalitions can shift. Environmental conditions can change. These sources of uncertainty weaken precise prediction and complicate causal attribution.

A relational analysis should therefore distinguish projection from commitment. It can identify mechanisms that plausibly alter future dependency, authority, exit, or option spaces without claiming to know the complete future trajectory. Scenario analysis, sensitivity analysis, institutional comparison, historical analogy, and explicit uncertainty ranges can be more appropriate than point prediction.

The same restraint applies to responsibility. An actor should not be held responsible for every remote consequence that can be imaginatively connected to its action. Foreseeability, causal contribution, institutional role, control, and later opportunities to revise all matter. Long-horizon relevance widens the field of inquiry; it does not eliminate boundaries on attribution.

This limitation is especially important for generative relational theory because its vocabulary can tempt analysts to describe every later transformation as an effect of an earlier relation. The discipline of selection introduced in Section 3 remains necessary. Temporal extension should follow plausible mechanisms, not narrative convenience.

7.10 Monitoring, Review, and Temporal Institutional Design

If consequences unfold over time, justice can concern the design of institutions that observe and respond to them. Monitoring is not merely technical evaluation. It determines which consequences become visible, to whom, and with what capacity for revision.

A temporally responsible arrangement can include scheduled review, sunset clauses, renewal requirements, independent audits, participant reporting channels, preservation of baseline data, and explicit triggers for reconsideration. These mechanisms distribute attention across time rather than concentrating it at the moment of initial authorization.

Review mechanisms can nevertheless become ritualized. A sunset clause can be routinely renewed. An audit can measure only immediate outputs. A consultation process can occur after major dependencies have already formed. Institutional design should therefore consider whether review remains practically capable of altering the relation rather than merely recording it.

The timing of review also matters. Too-early evaluation can miss delayed effects. Too-late evaluation can allow harmful structures to become difficult to reverse. Multiple review points can be preferable where consequences have different expected temporal profiles.

These considerations connect immediate and long-horizon justice without requiring complete prediction. The institution need not know every future consequence at the outset if it preserves adequate capacity to detect, contest, and respond to consequences as they become legible.

7.11 Temporal Distribution of Benefit, Burden, and Voice

Consequences can also be distributed across different persons or groups at different times. Those who receive immediate benefits may not be those who bear long-term costs. Present decision-makers may impose maintenance obligations on future participants. Future beneficiaries may have no voice in the original decision. Conversely, present actors can bear large transition costs for institutions whose benefits accrue mainly later.

This intertemporal distribution complicates ordinary consent and representation. Future participants cannot literally authorize present decisions. Present participants can also have legitimate interests that should not be subordinated indefinitely to hypothetical future welfare. Justice therefore needs institutional proxies for future concern without treating future interests as infinitely weighty.

The issue is not limited to future generations in the conventional sense. The same persons can occupy different relational positions over time. A worker may accept a dependency when alternatives are plentiful and later face exit costs after specialized investment. A community may accept infrastructure under one governance arrangement and later confront a successor institution with different incentives. Temporal justice therefore concerns continuity of position as well as succession between persons.

Voice across time can be partially supported through review rights, preservation of reasons, transparent commitments, amendment procedures, and institutions capable of representing interests that become visible only later. These devices cannot eliminate intertemporal conflict, but they make the temporal distribution of authority more explicit.

7.12 A Bounded Prospective Inquiry

The appropriate conclusion is neither short-term evaluation nor unlimited futurism. Justice of relational becoming requires a bounded prospective inquiry. The analyst should identify consequences that are sufficiently connected to the action, sufficiently significant for the relation, and sufficiently plausible to justify attention. The horizon should expand when credible mechanisms indicate persistent, cumulative, adaptive, or second-order effects. It should contract when attribution becomes speculative or the consequences cease to be meaningfully connected to the relational transformation under study.

This bounded approach also preserves room for plural normative perspectives. One theory may place special weight on present rights, another on future capabilities, another on domination, another on historical claim, and another on procedural authority. The temporal scaffold developed here does not decide among them. It identifies where temporal compression could cause the relevant concern to disappear from view.

The resulting discipline can be stated simply. Immediate consequences matter because justice is lived in the present. Long-horizon consequences matter because relations persist, adapt, and alter future possibilities. Neither temporal scale should silently displace the other.

Section 8 builds on this temporal analysis by examining a more specific second-order object: changes in the generative rules that structure how future relations can be formed, modified, contested, and exited.

8 Transformation of Generative Rules

The previous sections have treated justice as sensitive to relational history, lifecycle position, generated effect, and temporal horizon. This section turns to a more specific second-order object: the structures that condition how relations can subsequently change. A relation can be modified while leaving those structures largely intact. It can also be modified in a way that changes who may initiate later change, which alternatives remain reachable, what revision costs arise, which forms of contestation are institutionally recognized, and how future relations can be formed or exited. The latter kind of transformation cannot be captured adequately by evaluating only the immediate relational state.

This paper uses the term *generative rule* in a deliberately broad but bounded sense. It does not refer only to a written rule, legal norm, algorithm, or explicit decision procedure. It refers to the historically situated structure that conditions relevant possibilities of subsequent relational transformation. Depending on the case, that structure can include formal law, institutional jurisdiction, technical architecture, default procedures, resource dependencies, recognized interfaces, amendment rules, veto positions, inherited expectations, and durable distributions of practical capacity. The concept is therefore analytical rather than ontological. It identifies a second-order layer when that layer is necessary to explain why some relational changes are easy, costly, unavailable, or controlled by particular actors.

A simple formal representation is useful. Let R_t denote a relational configuration and let F_t denote a working representation of the structure governing relevant transformations from that configuration. The action map defined in Equation (1) represents a formally specified action as transforming both the relation and the relevant transformation structure. The mapping does not imply that one action is the sole cause of either outcome. It indicates only that justice analysis may need to inspect both the transformed relation and the transformed structure of later transformation. The central claim of this section is methodological: changes in generative rules can themselves be candidate objects of justice because they redistribute future capacities to form, maintain, modify, contest, suspend, exit, or replace relations.

8.1 Why Present-State Analysis Is Insufficient

A present state can look improved while the structure governing future change becomes more concentrated. An emergency intervention can reduce immediate danger while placing later review under the exclusive control of the intervener. A regulatory reform can correct one discriminatory outcome while centralizing the authority to define future categories. A platform can expand current access while making

users increasingly dependent on a proprietary interface through which later exit becomes costly. A public programme can improve current provision while eliminating alternative institutions that previously constrained the dominant provider.

These cases are not reducible to a contrast between good short-term outcomes and bad long-term outcomes. The issue is more specific. The action changes the distribution of future transformation capacity. The relation at $t + 1$ can therefore be assessed separately from the conditions under which $t + 2$, $t + 3$, and later configurations can be produced.

This distinction matters even when the current outcome is normatively desirable. Stable rights can be protected through institutions designed to be difficult to amend. Constitutional constraints can deliberately restrict later majorities. Long-term environmental commitments can limit present discretion in order to protect future interests. A rule that narrows future options is not unjust merely because it narrows them. The justice question concerns which capacities are constrained, for what reasons, under what authority, with what distributional effects, and with what possibility of legitimate revision.

The same point applies in the opposite direction. A reform that increases formal revisability may nevertheless make meaningful change harder if expertise, information, resources, or agenda control become concentrated. The relevant object is therefore not openness in the abstract. It is the actual structure through which change becomes possible or impossible for differently positioned participants.

8.2 What Counts as a Generative Rule

The expression *rule* can mislead if it suggests only explicit prescriptions. Many relations are generated through structures that no actor has formally enacted. A labour market can reproduce dependency through credential requirements, geographic concentration, and asymmetric access to information. A digital ecosystem can reproduce dependence through standards, APIs, data portability rules, and network effects. A humanitarian arrangement can reproduce authority through control over logistics, registration, and the recognized channels through which claims are made. A family relation can be stabilized through expectations, resource dependence, and social sanctions even where no written rule exists.

For this paper, a structure belongs in F_t only when it has explanatory relevance to how the relation can subsequently change. The concept should therefore remain selective. It is not a name for every background condition. A useful diagnostic question is whether altering the candidate structure would materially change the set, cost, authority, or distribution of feasible relational transformations while holding other relevant conditions reasonably constant.

Generative rules can be formal or informal, centralized or distributed, explicit or tacit, technical or social. They can concern who may initiate change, who must consent, what information is required, which procedures count as valid, which alternatives are reachable, what resources are needed, which temporal windows apply, and what sanctions follow from refusal or exit. Different cases can involve different subsets of these dimensions.

The concept also permits mixed structures. A statutory right of appeal can exist formally while a technical interface makes appeal inaccessible in practice. A contractual exit clause can coexist with prohibitive switching costs. A decentralized governance structure can coexist with centralized control over the data required for informed participation. In such cases the written rule and the effective generative rule diverge because the practical conditions of transformation are not captured by formal text alone.

8.3 First-Order and Second-Order Transformation

It is useful to distinguish transformations of a relation from transformations of the structure governing later transformations. A first-order change alters a relevant feature of the relation: allocation, role, dependency, access, recognition, obligation, communication, or another relational property. A second-order change alters how such first-order changes can later be produced.

The distinction is analytical rather than categorical. One action can do both. A court decision can resolve the immediate dispute and create a precedent that affects later disputes. A new administrative category can determine present eligibility and alter which kinds of evidence later institutions treat as

admissible. A technical redesign can change current functionality and establish a new default architecture for future modifications. An emergency measure can address an immediate threat and change the institutional threshold for invoking similar powers later.

Second-order transformation is particularly important when it changes revision authority. If one actor gains exclusive power to amend the arrangement, later consent by others can become less consequential even when their current position improves. If review is transferred to an independent institution, the immediate state may remain largely unchanged while future contestation becomes more credible. If a common infrastructure becomes proprietary, later changes can depend on permission from a gatekeeper who did not previously occupy that position.

This is one reason justice of relational becoming cannot be reduced to outcome comparison. Two reforms can produce similar immediate distributions while creating sharply different structures of future revision. Their present states may therefore underdescribe their normative significance.

8.4 Distribution of Transformation Capacity

Generative rules distribute capacities unevenly. Some actors can initiate change. Others can block it. Some can define the agenda, supply admissible evidence, control the technical interface, or absorb the costs of transition. Others possess only nominal participation rights. Justice analysis should therefore ask how transformation capacity is distributed rather than merely whether a formal amendment procedure exists.

Several positions are relevant. Initiative concerns the capacity to place a change on the agenda. Authorization concerns the capacity to make the change valid. Veto concerns the capacity to prevent it. Interpretation concerns the capacity to determine whether procedural requirements have been satisfied. Implementation concerns the capacity to make an authorized change effective. Exit concerns the capacity to leave the arrangement rather than amend it. Resource control concerns the capacity to finance, technically support, or otherwise sustain the transition.

No one of these positions automatically establishes injustice. Concentrated authority can sometimes be justified by expertise, emergency, fiduciary role, constitutional design, or the need to protect vulnerable participants. Distributed authority can also reproduce exclusion when participation requires resources or knowledge available only to some actors. The analytical task is to identify how the generative rule allocates transformation capacity and then ask what normative justification, if any, supports that allocation.

This distribution can be historically inherited. An actor may control present revision not because a current decision granted the power, but because earlier investments, legal settlements, institutional mergers, or accumulated expertise created a position that later became difficult to contest. Path-dependence scholarship is relevant because early sequences can reshape later costs and institutional possibilities (Piereson 2000; Mahoney 2000). The justice question concerns when that inherited asymmetry remains normatively relevant and what kinds of revision can address it without treating history alone as a verdict.

8.5 Revision Costs, Lock-In, and Default Paths

A generative rule can shape justice through the cost of revision. An arrangement can remain formally revisable while becoming practically difficult to change because complementary investments, legal dependencies, specialized knowledge, data formats, physical infrastructure, or social expectations accumulate around it. Lock-in is therefore not only persistence. It is a structure in which the cost of leaving or revising the current path becomes increasingly asymmetric or prohibitive.

This can occur without deliberate design. A technical standard can become dominant because coordination benefits increase with adoption. An administrative classification can become difficult to replace because databases, forms, eligibility rules, and professional training depend on it. A welfare programme can become the sole practical provider because alternatives disappear. A temporary security architecture can become permanent because agencies, contracts, and information systems are built around it.

Justice analysis should distinguish lock-in from stability. Stability can be desirable when it protects legitimate expectations, rights, trust, or coordination. Lock-in becomes normatively concerning when

the costs of revision are produced or distributed in ways that make meaningful contestation inaccessible, preserve a historically contingent concentration of power without adequate justification, or prevent correction of harms that have become newly visible.

Default paths also matter. A system can permit multiple outcomes while making one route dramatically easier than others. Default enrollment, standard contract terms, recommended technical settings, evidential presumptions, and procedural sequencing can all shape later relational states without formally prohibiting alternatives. A generative rule therefore concerns not only possibility but the practical topology of possibility: which transitions are easy, costly, delayed, stigmatized, or institutionally supported.

8.6 Informal and Infrastructural Rule Transformation

Some of the most important changes in generative rules occur without formal amendment. A platform changes an API. A court alters an evidential practice. An agency reorganizes internal review. A new database architecture changes what information is visible. A funding model makes certain institutions dependent on a single provider. A dominant actor becomes the de facto translator between heterogeneous participants. None of these developments must appear as an explicit revision of the rules governing the relation, yet they can materially alter future transformation capacity.

This is where the present paper connects with the earlier analysis of ethical legibility and interpretive infrastructure. Control over classification, interfaces, archives, and boundaries can become part of the generative rule when those structures determine which transformations can be proposed, understood, challenged, or implemented. The justice of relational becoming therefore cannot isolate formal institutional design from the infrastructures through which design becomes effective.

Infrastructural change can also redistribute dependence. When a common resource is reorganized around a proprietary system, participants may gain immediate efficiency while losing independent capacity to maintain or alter the relation. When interpretation depends on one technical model, participants can become reliant on the actor capable of operating or auditing that model. When historical records are centralized, future revision may depend on access granted by the archive holder.

Again, these consequences do not establish injustice by themselves. Centralization can improve reliability, safety, coordination, and accountability. The relevant question is whether the transformation of infrastructure changes the distribution of future relational power in ways that the initial justification does not adequately address.

8.7 Constraint, Commitment, and Beneficial Rigidity

A theory that treats every reduction in future transformability as suspect would be normatively implausible. Justice often depends on commitments designed to resist easy revision. Anti-discrimination protections, constitutional guarantees, fiduciary duties, environmental limits, professional standards, and long-term contracts can be valuable precisely because they stabilize expectations and restrict opportunistic change.

The relevant contrast is therefore not rigidity versus flexibility. It is justified versus unjustified structuring of future transformation. A durable constraint can protect vulnerable participants against more powerful actors. A veto can prevent unilateral dispossession. A high amendment threshold can safeguard a right. An irrevocable commitment can make cooperation possible where mutual assurance would otherwise fail.

At the same time, rigidity can protect domination. A rule can make exploitative dependency difficult to contest. A constitutional settlement can entrench unequal political status. A technical standard can freeze out alternatives. A contract can bind participants whose bargaining position has deteriorated in ways not anticipated at formation. The normative meaning of rigidity depends on what it stabilizes, who authorized it, who bears its costs, what alternatives existed, and whether later circumstances undermine the original justification.

This point is crucial for the paper's use of the term *generative*. Generativity is not an overriding good. Some future relations should not remain equally easy to generate. Some options should be removed.

Some powers should be constrained. The analytical contribution lies in making those transformations visible as objects of judgment rather than presuming that more future openness is always better.

8.8 Cumulative Drift in Generative Rules

Generative rules can change incrementally. No single decision may appear significant, yet repeated small alterations can shift the structure of future transformation. Review periods become shorter. Evidence requirements become more demanding. Informal consultation becomes optional. Technical dependencies accumulate. Alternative institutions lose funding. Temporary exceptions become precedents. Over time, a relation can acquire a very different generative structure without a clear founding moment.

This cumulative drift complicates responsibility. Later actors inherit a rule structure partly produced by many earlier decisions. Some changes were deliberate, others adaptive, and others unintended. The eventual structure can therefore be nobody's complete design while still concentrating power or narrowing effective alternatives.

Structural-responsibility approaches are relevant because they resist the idea that responsibility exists only where one actor intentionally designed the final outcome (Young 2011). The present analysis adds a temporal second-order question: which actors had meaningful capacity to maintain, revise, contest, or reproduce the generative rule at different stages of its development?

Cumulative drift also complicates repair. Reversing one recent decision may not restore the earlier transformation structure. Expertise, institutions, resources, and expectations may have migrated. A justice response may therefore need to rebuild capacities for revision rather than merely repeal the last formal rule.

8.9 Evaluating Changes in Generative Rules

Once changes in F_t are recognized as candidate objects of justice, the next question is how they should be evaluated. This paper does not propose a single metric. Different normative theories can emphasize different concerns. A capability approach can ask how the transformed rule affects substantive opportunities for future action (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2006). A republican approach can ask whether it increases exposure to uncontrolled interference (Pettit 1997). A relational egalitarian approach can examine whether it creates or entrenches objectionable hierarchy. A procedural theory can focus on participation, review, transparency, and authority. A historical approach can examine whether the rule reproduces an unjustly generated position.

The generative-relational contribution is therefore not a new supreme standard. It is a specification of the object that those standards may need to evaluate. A present-state description can omit who controls later revision, what alternatives survive, how exit costs change, whether contestation remains effective, and which institutions become capable of shaping future relations. Making those features explicit can alter the application of otherwise familiar normative principles.

Several evaluative questions recur across theories. Who gains and loses transformation capacity? Which changes become easier or harder? Are the constraints formally equal but practically asymmetric? Is the change reversible, and by whom? Does the arrangement preserve credible contestation? Does it create a dependence that exceeds the justification for the original intervention? Are the costs of future correction imposed mainly on those with the least influence over the present decision? These questions do not constitute a complete theory of justice, but they provide a disciplined agenda for evaluating rule transformation.

8.10 Evidence and Reconstruction of Generative Rules

Generative rules are not always directly observable. Formal law can be inspected, but effective transformation structures often have to be reconstructed from practice. Who actually succeeds in initiating change? Which appeals alter outcomes? What resources are required? Which vetoes are decisive? How

often are nominal exit rights exercised, and at what cost? Which actors can modify the technical or evidential infrastructure? Which alternatives have disappeared over time?

This evidential problem matters because analysts can easily infer too much from formal design. An institution can appear participatory on paper while operating through concentrated agenda control. A system can appear decentralized while key infrastructural dependencies remain centralized. A relation can appear revisable while participants lack the resources to survive the transition.

Historical evidence is often necessary. Changes in revision cost, institutional alternatives, expertise, and dependency may become visible only through comparison across time. Counterfactual evidence can also help, though it should be used cautiously. Comparable jurisdictions, organizations, platforms, or communities can reveal whether a transformation was structurally necessary or one contingent pathway among several.

The reconstruction should remain purpose-specific. The analyst need not model every mechanism of future change. The relevant task is to identify those features of F_t that bear on the justice question under examination. This preserves the discipline of selection developed in Section 3 and prevents the concept of generative rule from expanding into a name for the entire social world.

8.11 Limits of the Generative-Rule Concept

The concept has several risks. First, it can become too broad. If every background condition is treated as part of F_t , the distinction between relational state and generative rule loses analytical value. Second, it can become deterministic. A generative rule conditions later possibilities but does not uniquely determine them. Agency, innovation, resistance, exogenous shocks, and new institutions can alter trajectories. Third, it can become normatively loaded. Calling a structure generative does not imply that it should be preserved, expanded, or maximized.

Fourth, the concept can encourage speculative futurism. Justice should not attribute moral significance to imagined downstream transformations without plausible mechanisms. Fifth, changes in F_t can be difficult to distinguish from changes in R_t because relational positions and transformation rules often co-constitute one another. The distinction should therefore be used when it clarifies the case, not defended as an ontological partition.

Finally, the framework does not itself answer who has authority to change a generative rule. Identifying a concentrated or unjustified transformation structure does not establish that any observer, institution, or participant may legitimately redesign it. That issue is the subject of the next section.

8.12 Generative Rules as a Candidate Object of Justice

The argument of this section can be stated without treating generativity as a moral ideal. Relations are transformed within historically produced structures that distribute capacities to initiate, authorize, contest, implement, refuse, and exit later changes. Present action can alter those structures. When it does, justice may need to evaluate not only the immediate relational outcome but the redistribution of future transformation capacity.

This second-order perspective is especially important where present improvements coexist with future concentration, where temporary measures create durable revision authority, where infrastructures silently change the practical conditions of exit or contestation, and where cumulative drift makes later correction increasingly difficult. It is equally important where durable constraints protect rights, secure cooperation, or prevent arbitrary interference. The task is not to prefer flexibility over stability but to make the structure of future change visible enough for normative evaluation.

Section 9 therefore turns from the object of transformation to a different question: who has standing, permission, or authority to alter a relation or its generative rules in the first place?

9 Authority over Relational Change

Section 8 treated changes in generative rules as candidate objects of justice. That move immediately raises a separate normative question. Even if an existing relation is badly structured, even if a proposed transformation would improve some important dimension of that relation, and even if the relevant effects can be reconstructed with reasonable confidence, it does not follow that any actor who recognizes the problem is entitled to redesign the relation. The authority to transform is itself relationally situated.

This section develops that distinction. Its purpose is not to provide a complete theory of political legitimacy or consent. It is to identify the questions that become visible once authority is treated as a distinct site of justice within relational becoming. The central concern is scope: who may initiate, authorize, impose, block, revise, or terminate a relational transformation, with respect to which part of the relation, under what conditions, and for how long?

The problem is especially acute when transformation affects not only a present relational state but the future generative structure discussed in Section 8. Authority to alter a current arrangement can be narrower than authority to alter the rules governing later revision, exit, evidence, participation, or institutional succession. A temporary power to stabilize a relation need not include a durable power to define how that relation may subsequently change.

9.1 Judgment and Transformative Authority

A first discipline is to keep normative judgment separate from transformative authority. An actor can have good reasons to judge that a relation contains domination, exclusion, exploitation, dependency, or another serious problem while lacking authority to reorganize it unilaterally. Conversely, an actor can possess institutionally recognized authority while making a substantively poor judgment about the relation.

This distinction matters because ethical and political discourse often moves too quickly from diagnosis to control. Expertise can identify a problem. A court can establish a violation. A humanitarian actor can identify an urgent risk. A regulator can detect a market failure. A community member can recognize exclusion. None of these facts, taken alone, settles the scope of permissible transformation.

Relational justice therefore asks two different questions. The first concerns the relation being judged. The second concerns the relation between the proposed transformer and those whose relational world would be changed. The latter includes questions of mandate, consent, dependence, role, accountability, affectedness, expertise, and the availability of contestation.

The distinction also protects against a paternalistic inference. The fact that one actor can describe another actor's situation more accurately does not by itself establish a right to govern that actor. Knowledge can be relevant to the quality of a decision without constituting the source of authority for making it.

9.2 Possible Grounds of Transformative Authority

Transformative authority can arise through different relational grounds. These grounds should not be collapsed into a single formula because they generate different scopes, burdens, and limits.

Participation and consent. Participants can authorize changes to relations in which they are involved. Consent is often normatively important because it links transformation to the agency of those whose relational positions will change. Yet consent is not self-interpreting. Its significance depends on what was disclosed, what alternatives were effective, whether refusal was feasible, which future powers were transferred, and whether the authorization was revocable.

A participant may consent to a specific modification without authorizing broader control over the relation. Agreement to temporary data access need not authorize indefinite archival retention. Acceptance of emergency assistance need not authorize long-term institutional supervision. Consent to one contractual amendment need not authorize unilateral changes to the mechanism of future amendment.

Entrusted or institutional role. Authority can arise from a role that participants or a wider institution have created. Judges, trustees, guardians, regulators, arbitrators, administrators, and organizational officers can possess powers that are not reducible to personal consent at every moment. The relevant justice questions then include how the role was constituted, what purposes justify it, how its boundaries are defined, how role-holders are selected, and what review or removal mechanisms exist.

Role-based authority is therefore purpose-sensitive. A role created to protect safety does not automatically carry authority over unrelated dimensions of a participant's life. A regulator authorized to impose reporting standards does not thereby acquire authority to redesign all underlying commercial relations. Institutional authority becomes difficult to justify when its effective scope expands beyond the problem for which the role was constituted.

Causal or structural implication. An actor who helped generate a harmful relation can acquire responsibilities concerning its repair. Young's social connection model is relevant here because responsibility need not depend on individual fault or complete causal control (Young 2011). Yet responsibility for helping to address a problem and authority to redesign the affected relation remain distinct.

A powerful institution may be obliged to contribute resources, disclose information, remove a barrier, or cease a harmful practice without possessing authority to determine the final form of the repaired relation. Causal implication can ground duties of contribution while leaving decision authority distributed among affected participants and other legitimate institutions.

Acquired power and dependency. Authority questions can also arise where one actor already controls resources, infrastructure, or conditions on which others depend. Such control often creates responsibilities because decisions are unavoidable: access must be granted or denied, systems must be maintained, and scarce resources must be allocated. Yet existing control does not automatically legitimate itself. A monopolistic platform, occupying force, dominant employer, or emergency administrator may possess practical power without possessing normatively adequate authority.

This distinction is especially important in relational systems because the holder of practical control can shape the very alternatives through which its authority might later be contested. The existence of dependency can therefore strengthen the need for accountability rather than serve as a sufficient justification for unilateral rule.

Public mandate and collective authorization. Some transformations concern shared institutions or conditions that no individual participant can govern alone. Democratic authorization, constitutional procedures, public law, or other collective arrangements can provide a basis for authority in such cases. Rawls's focus on the basic structure and fair terms of social cooperation illustrates why institutional authority cannot always be reconstructed as a sequence of individual transactions (Rawls 1999).

Collective authorization nevertheless raises familiar questions about inclusion, representation, minority protection, and the boundaries of the affected public. The existence of a vote or procedure does not by itself answer whether the proper participants were included or whether the institution had jurisdiction over the relation being transformed.

9.3 Affectedness, Exposure, and Voice

Affectedness is an important reason for inclusion in decisions about relational change, but it should not be treated as a simple sovereignty principle. Many transformations generate effects beyond the immediate parties. Infrastructure changes can affect users who did not design the system. Environmental decisions can affect distant communities. Institutional reforms can alter the options of future participants. Humanitarian interventions can redistribute risk across neighboring populations.

The difficulty is that affectedness is scalar, heterogeneous, and temporally distributed. Some actors bear immediate material costs. Others face probabilistic risks. Others lose political voice, cultural

continuity, ecological security, or future options. Some effects are reversible and others are not. A governance rule that grants complete veto power to every affected actor can make collective action impossible, while a rule that ignores indirect or future effects can systematically privilege those closest to formal decision-making.

A more careful approach treats affectedness as one factor in allocating voice, review, and protection rather than as an automatic source of comprehensive authority. The form of inclusion can vary. Some actors may require decision rights; others may require consultation, compensation, disclosure, appeal, or protection against specified risks. The justice question concerns how the form and strength of participation track the kind and magnitude of relational exposure.

This point also matters for future participants. They cannot literally consent to present changes, yet current actors can alter the generative rules they will inherit. Constitutional design, ecological transformation, debt, infrastructure, data retention, and long-term institutional commitments all raise this problem. Justice therefore has to consider representation of future interests without pretending that present institutions can perfectly speak for future persons.

9.4 Expertise without Sovereignty

Transformations often depend on specialized knowledge. Medical treatment, environmental restoration, algorithmic governance, infrastructure engineering, humanitarian logistics, and institutional reform all require forms of expertise that affected participants may not possess. It would be implausible to deny expertise any authority-relevant role. Yet it is equally problematic to treat expertise as a complete source of normative jurisdiction.

The useful distinction is between epistemic authority and transformative authority. Experts can be especially well positioned to estimate causal mechanisms, technical feasibility, risk, or likely consequences. Those judgments can constrain responsible action. But expertise does not settle how competing values should be balanced, who should bear costs, what forms of dependence are acceptable, or which participants should control later revision.

This distinction becomes especially important where expertise is institutionally concentrated. Technical specialists can shape the menu of feasible options, the language in which problems are described, and the evidential standards by which alternatives are assessed. Even without formal decision power, they can influence relational transformation by structuring what appears possible or rational.

Justice therefore concerns both the use of expertise and the institutional conditions under which expertise becomes contestable. Independent review, disclosure of assumptions, alternative expert capacity, participant knowledge, and mechanisms for revising technical judgments can help prevent epistemic advantage from becoming unaccountable transformative power.

9.5 Consent under Generated Constraints

Consent becomes particularly difficult in a generative-relational framework because the alternatives against which consent is given are themselves historically produced. A participant can formally agree while facing severe dependence, lack of exit, information asymmetry, institutional exclusion, or costs created by earlier relations.

This does not mean constrained consent is always invalid. Nearly all choices occur under constraints. The relevant question is how the structure of effective alternatives bears on the authority claimed from the consent. A narrow set of alternatives can weaken the justificatory force of agreement, especially where the actor seeking authorization helped create or maintain those constraints.

The problem is recursive when consent is used to authorize changes to future consent conditions. A participant might accept a platform's terms today while those terms permit unilateral alteration tomorrow. A worker might accept a governance procedure that reduces later bargaining capacity. A community might consent to emergency administration that modifies the conditions under which the emergency authority can subsequently be reviewed.

For this reason, authority over generative rules deserves stricter scrutiny than authority over a single bounded transaction. Authorization that affects later revision, exit, or contestation can change the conditions under which future authorization will be expressed. The present act of consent cannot simply be treated as if it occurred outside that temporal structure.

9.6 Authority over State Change and Authority over Rule Change

Section 8 distinguished changes in the current relational state from changes in the generative rules governing future transformation. The same distinction applies to authority.

An institution may legitimately possess authority to alter a present relation while lacking authority to redesign the rules of later transformation. A court may order a remedy without having power to rewrite the constitutional amendment process. An emergency administrator may impose temporary movement restrictions without acquiring authority to create a permanent surveillance regime. A mediator may facilitate an agreement without gaining authority to control future dispute resolution. A platform moderator may remove a harmful interaction without obtaining legitimate power to redefine user governance indefinitely.

The reason is not that rule change is always more morally serious. Some present-state transformations are irreversible and profound, while some procedural changes are minor. The point is that rule change can redistribute future authority. It can alter who will be able to initiate, contest, veto, exit, or reinterpret later transformations.

A justice analysis should therefore ask whether the mandate for immediate change actually extends to the second-order powers being created. This is one place where temporary measures can become normatively misleading. An intervention may be justified by urgent circumstances while simultaneously establishing a durable architecture that was never separately authorized.

9.7 Emergency and Provisional Authority

Emergency cases make the separation between judgment and authority especially difficult. Delay can itself produce severe harm. Full participation may be impossible. Information may be incomplete. The actor with immediate capacity to respond may not have a prior mandate.

A generative-relational account should not resolve this problem by insisting that authority must always be fully constituted before action. That would make some forms of rescue or stabilization impossible. Nor should urgency be treated as a blank cheque for durable transformation.

A useful distinction is between provisional authority to prevent or limit an immediate loss and broader authority to redesign the relation. The justification for provisional action can depend on urgency, reversibility, necessity, proportionality, the availability of alternatives, and the degree to which the action preserves later participation and review. The more an emergency measure alters future generative rules, the stronger the case for independent authorization once immediate danger has passed.

This structure also clarifies why reversibility matters without becoming an absolute rule. A reversible action can reduce the cost of epistemic or normative error. Yet some emergencies require irreversible action. In such cases, the burden shifts toward stronger justification, narrower scope, better evidence where available, and more serious attention to who bears the consequences of error.

9.8 Distributed and Polycentric Authority

Relational transformation need not be governed by a single sovereign center. Different actors can legitimately control different dimensions of change. Participants can retain authority over intimate or identity-relevant relations; technical bodies can manage narrow infrastructural questions; courts can review rights violations; public institutions can govern shared conditions; independent bodies can preserve evidence or adjudicate disputes.

This distribution can reduce the danger that competence in one domain becomes comprehensive jurisdiction. It can also create coordination problems, gaps, and conflicts. Multiple legitimate authorities

can issue incompatible directives. Some actors can strategically shift disputes to the forum most favorable to them. Jurisdictional fragmentation can make accountability difficult.

The justice question is therefore not simply whether authority is centralized or decentralized. It concerns the fit between the type of relational change and the institution authorized to govern it. A polycentric arrangement can be unjust if powerful actors control the interfaces among centers or if marginalized participants must navigate inaccessible procedures across many institutions.

Distributed authority should also be distinguished from diffuse responsibility. If everybody is nominally involved but nobody has a clear duty or capacity to act, the structure can produce paralysis. Institutional design may therefore need both distributed participation and sufficiently determinate allocation of decision responsibility.

9.9 Refusal, Veto, and the Authority Not to Change

Authority over relational change includes the authority to resist change. Refusal, veto, non-cooperation, and exit can protect participants against imposed transformation. Yet veto power can also entrench harmful relations and allow incumbents to block reforms that affect others.

The normative significance of refusal therefore depends on the relation in which it operates. A person's refusal of bodily intervention has a different structure from a monopolist's veto over market regulation or an institution's refusal to disclose evidence needed for accountability. Treating all vetoes as instances of autonomy would obscure differences in dependency, external effects, prior commitment, and power.

There is also a temporal issue. A participant can reasonably demand stability after making investments or forming expectations under an existing arrangement. At the same time, indefinite veto rights can freeze relations whose background conditions have changed. Justice must therefore consider when reliance interests, autonomy, and legitimate expectations justify resistance to transformation and when they instead reproduce an unjustified status quo.

This problem reinforces the importance of lifecycle analysis. Authority to refuse formation, authority to resist modification, authority to exit, and authority to prevent removal are not the same. Each concerns a different stage of relational becoming and can have a different normative basis.

9.10 Authority Drift and Self-Expansion

Transformative authority can expand through use. Institutions acquire expertise, data, personnel, legal precedent, and infrastructural capacity while exercising a mandate. These resources can make further intervention easier and can create constituencies interested in institutional continuation. Temporary authority can thus become self-reinforcing even without a deliberate plan for expansion.

This is not necessarily improper. Experience can improve competence. Stable institutions can reduce coordination costs and provide reliable protection. The problem arises when accumulated capacity substitutes for renewed justification. An institution can begin to act as though the fact that it can govern a relation demonstrates that it should govern that relation.

Authority drift is particularly important where the same actor controls problem definition, evidence production, intervention, and review. In such settings, transformation can alter both the relation and the institutional conditions under which the actor's own authority is evaluated.

Justice therefore has reason to examine sunset provisions, periodic reauthorization, external review, separation of functions, and institutional exit. These mechanisms do not guarantee legitimacy, but they can reduce the tendency of temporary transformative power to become self-validating.

9.11 Authority under Heterogeneity

The problem becomes harder when participants do not share the same interpretive or normative framework. An actor can sincerely believe that intervention is necessary while the affected participant does not

recognize the category through which the intervention is justified. This issue is especially visible in relations involving artificial systems, non-human animals, radically different communities, or hypothetical unfamiliar forms of life.

The framework developed in the preceding companion work on heterogeneous relations is relevant here, but the present paper does not assume that heterogeneity itself creates an obligation or authority to intervene. The immediate point is narrower: epistemic difficulty makes the basis of transformative authority more fragile, not automatically stronger.

Where interpretation is uncertain, authority can sometimes rest on a pre-existing role, a request for assistance, control over a shared condition, or responsibility for a risk the actor helped create. In other cases, restraint can be appropriate because the actor lacks both adequate understanding and legitimate standing to reorganize the relation.

Heterogeneity also intensifies the problem of proxy authority. Human institutions may claim to represent animals, artificial agents, future persons, or unknown entities that cannot participate in familiar procedures. Proxy representation may be unavoidable, but its legitimacy depends on evidential humility, conflict-of-interest controls, revision, and preservation of the possibility that later knowledge changes the representation itself.

9.12 Limits of an Authority-Centered Analysis

Authority is not the only relevant normative category. A transformation can be substantively unjust even when properly authorized. Conversely, a formally unauthorized action can sometimes be morally defensible, especially under emergency conditions or where existing institutions are deeply unjust. The framework should therefore resist treating authority as a complete criterion of justice.

Nor is authority always clearly identifiable. Informal norms, market power, architecture, social expectations, and technical defaults can transform relations without any actor issuing an explicit command. In such cases, the useful question may concern distributed control and responsibility rather than a discrete authorization event.

A focus on authority can also overstate voluntarism. Many relations change through demographic shifts, technological development, ecological disruption, cultural transformation, or cumulative adaptation. Justice can still evaluate the resulting relational structure even where no actor possessed authority over the full process.

Finally, authority itself can be historically generated through unjust relations. Institutional recognition of a power does not establish its legitimacy. The genealogy of authority, the alternatives available at its formation, and the way it has been maintained remain relevant to its present evaluation.

9.13 Authority as a Distinct Site of Justice

The central claim of this section is modest. Relational diagnosis, responsibility, practical capacity, expertise, affectedness, consent, and institutional role can all matter to transformative authority, but none should be treated as an automatic substitute for the others. Authority is scoped, relational, historical, and often distributed.

This matters especially when actions alter generative rules. A mandate to improve a present condition can be narrower than a mandate to redistribute future capacities for revision, exit, contestation, or institutional succession. Justice should therefore examine not only whether a transformation is desirable, but whether the actor imposing or authorizing it occupies a defensible relational position with respect to that change.

The next section turns to one of the most important conditions of both authority and relational freedom: effective alternatives. Formal permission to leave or refuse a relation can coexist with practical inability to do so. Section 10 therefore examines the justice of exit and the difference between formally available and effectively accessible alternatives.

10 Effective Alternatives and the Justice of Exit

The previous section examined authority over relational change. Authority, however, cannot be evaluated independently of the alternatives effectively available to those who are governed, constrained, represented, or transformed. A relation can appear voluntary because formal refusal is permitted while remaining practically difficult to leave. A contract can be terminable while exit would destroy housing, income, legal status, social membership, access to care, or the capacity to participate elsewhere. An institutional order can announce multiple options while structuring the surrounding conditions so that only one of them is realistically usable. For this reason, the justice of relational becoming requires attention not only to whether alternatives exist in principle, but also to whether they are effectively accessible within the history and structure of the relation.

This section develops a limited account of *effective alternatives* and the *justice of exit*. The aim is not to make exit the master criterion of relational justice. Some valuable relations are constitutively durable; some obligations remain binding despite a participant's wish to leave; some forms of public membership cannot be modeled adequately as optional contracts; and some relations should be repaired rather than abandoned. The narrower claim is that the availability, cost, distribution, and consequences of alternatives are important features of a relation's generative structure. They affect how consent, dependence, authority, domination, and responsibility should be interpreted.

10.1 Formal Alternatives and Effective Alternatives

A formal alternative is an option recognized by the explicit rules of a system. An employee may be legally free to resign. A tenant may be permitted to terminate a lease. A platform user may be entitled to delete an account. A political participant may have a formal right to leave an association. These possibilities matter. Formal prohibition is often a powerful form of constraint.

Yet formal permission is not the same as effective accessibility. An option can be formally available while requiring resources, knowledge, documentation, mobility, social support, technical competence, legal standing, or tolerable risk that the participant does not possess. The capability approach is relevant here because it directs attention from nominal resources or permissions toward what persons are substantively able to do and be (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2006). Republican concerns with domination are also relevant because dependence on another's discretionary power can matter even where direct interference has not occurred (Pettit 1997).

For the present analysis, let $\Omega_i^{\text{formal}}(t)$ denote the set of options institutionally or explicitly available to participant i at time t , and let $\Omega_i^{\text{eff}}(t)$ denote the subset that is practically accessible under the participant's actual relational conditions. The formal relation is

$$\Omega_i^{\text{eff}}(t) \subseteq \Omega_i^{\text{formal}}(t). \quad (6)$$

Equation (6) is deliberately weak. It does not specify a universal threshold of accessibility. What counts as effective depends on the type of option, the relevant costs, the stakes of the decision, the participant's capacities, and the historical conditions under which those capacities were formed.

The difference between the two sets matters because justice can be distorted when institutions point to formal alternatives while ignoring the relational conditions that make them unusable. The presence of a formally recognized exit can be invoked to defend a relation as voluntary even where departure would impose catastrophic loss. Conversely, the absence of easy exit does not by itself prove injustice. Parenthood, public obligations, ecological interdependence, and emergency institutions can involve durable responsibilities that cannot be reduced to an unrestricted right of withdrawal. Effective alternatives are therefore evidentially important without becoming a complete theory of justice.

10.2 Exit as a Relational Capability

Exit should be understood as a relational capability rather than a binary legal permission. To leave a relation, a participant may need access to an alternative relation, a replacement resource, a recognized

identity outside the original arrangement, or an institution capable of protecting the transition. Exit can therefore depend on the wider relational field rather than on the focal relation alone.

Consider a worker whose employment contract permits resignation but whose visa, housing, insurance, and family residence all depend on the employer. The formal employment relation contains an exit clause, yet the effective exit condition is produced by a wider configuration of legal and economic dependencies. Similarly, a user may be able to delete an online account while losing irreplaceable social connections, data histories, professional visibility, or access to interoperable services. In both cases, the justice question concerns not merely whether exit exists on paper, but how the surrounding relational system distributes the cost of using it.

The same structure appears in institutional and political settings. A local community may formally be free to withdraw from a development agreement while lacking legal expertise, alternative financing, or control over infrastructure already transferred to the project. A patient may theoretically refuse a care arrangement while lacking another provider. A smaller organization may be contractually free to terminate a platform dependency while being unable to replicate the technical infrastructure on which its operations now rely.

Exit is therefore not best understood as an isolated choice. It is often supported or constrained by a network of complementary relations. This makes exit a useful site for generative analysis: present arrangements can alter the conditions under which future departure becomes easier, harder, safer, or more costly.

10.3 The Genealogy of Alternatives

Section 4 argued that justice sometimes requires a genealogy of present relations. The same applies to alternatives. A participant's current option set has a history. Alternatives can be created, preserved, narrowed, rendered more costly, or made institutionally unintelligible over time.

This matters because a relation can appear voluntary at a later stage after earlier transformations have removed realistic alternatives. A dominant platform can become indispensable only after competitors disappear. A public authority can centralize functions gradually until local exit is administratively impossible. A household arrangement can become difficult to leave after one participant has withdrawn from paid work for many years under shared expectations. A humanitarian camp can become effectively permanent after surrounding infrastructure and legal pathways deteriorate. In each case, the present absence of alternatives may be partly generated by the relation itself or by institutions connected to it.

The justice inquiry should therefore ask how the present option structure was produced. If a powerful actor benefits from the disappearance of alternatives that it helped suppress, appeals to current consent or voluntary continuation deserve closer scrutiny. At the same time, historical causation must not be exaggerated. Alternatives often disappear through technological change, demographic shifts, ecological disruption, or decisions made by many independent actors. Genealogical relevance requires a plausible connection between prior relational processes and present effective options.

The genealogy of alternatives also matters for responsibility. An individual who acts within a severely narrowed option space may bear responsibility for a harmful action while the institutions that generated that narrowness bear a different kind of responsibility. The present paper does not attempt to solve the full problem of distributed responsibility, but it treats the production of effective alternatives as part of the relational background against which agency is judged.

10.4 Exit Costs and the Distribution of Burden

Exit can be available yet unjustly expensive. The relevant costs are not only financial. They can include loss of status, identity, care, community, language, reputation, legal protection, accumulated data, professional qualification, mobility, or access to future opportunities. Some costs are unavoidable consequences of ending a valuable relation. Others are deliberately imposed or institutionally amplified.

This distinction matters. A relation may involve legitimate reliance interests. If one party has made substantial investments on the expectation of continued cooperation, immediate costless withdrawal by

another party can impose serious burdens. Long-term contracts, research collaborations, public institutions, and care relations often require some stability precisely because participants organize their lives around them. Justice cannot therefore require that every relation be instantly and costlessly terminable.

The more precise question concerns the distribution and justification of exit burdens. Who bears the cost of leaving? Were those costs foreseeable? Were they created through unilateral design? Do they protect legitimate reliance or function mainly as deterrents against departure? Are they proportionate to the relation at stake? Can the burden be shared or compensated? Do different participants face radically unequal exit costs despite formally symmetrical rules?

Asymmetric exit costs are particularly important where one side controls infrastructure needed by the other. An employer, state, platform, household authority, or dominant organization can make continued participation appear voluntary while controlling the resources required for departure. The relation may not contain an explicit prohibition, but its surrounding design can make withdrawal practically prohibitive.

A justice analysis should therefore avoid treating formal symmetry as sufficient. Identical contractual exit clauses can produce very different effective conditions for participants with unequal resources, dependencies, or outside options.

10.5 Exit, Voice, and Internal Contestation

Exit is only one response to an objectionable relation. Participants can also seek revision from within. They can contest rules, demand recognition, negotiate modification, create representative structures, appeal to external institutions, or organize collectively. A relation that provides strong internal mechanisms of revision may remain justifiable despite costly exit. Conversely, an easy exit option does not necessarily excuse a structure that silences participants while shifting the entire burden of correction onto those harmed by it.

This is especially important in public and quasi-public relations. Telling dissatisfied citizens, workers, patients, students, or platform users simply to leave can obscure the fact that the institution controls valuable shared goods or occupies a position that cannot easily be replicated. Exit can become a substitute for accountability when institutions treat departure as the only remedy for contestation.

The relation between exit and voice is also strategic. A credible capacity to leave can strengthen a participant's bargaining position within the relation. Where exit is impossible, internal voice may depend heavily on the goodwill of those controlling the relation. Conversely, collective voice can make individual exit less necessary by improving the relation for participants who prefer to remain.

For generative-relational analysis, the key point is that institutions distribute not only exit opportunities but also capacities for internal transformation. A relation can be highly stable while remaining contestable. Another can be formally flexible while giving participants little effective influence over its terms. Justice should therefore examine the broader architecture of revision rather than assuming that freedom is exhausted by the option to depart.

10.6 Partial Exit, Layered Exit, and Relational Unbundling

Relations are often bundles of functions rather than indivisible wholes. A participant may wish to leave one dimension of a relation while retaining another. A worker may want to change employment without losing immigration status. A patient may want to change a provider without losing access to medical records. A platform user may want to leave the service while preserving social contacts or data portability. A region may seek greater political autonomy without abandoning economic cooperation.

This suggests the importance of *partial exit* and *relational unbundling*. If institutions tie many indispensable functions together, the cost of leaving one component becomes the cost of losing the whole bundle. Bundling can generate dependence even when every component is individually defensible.

The justice question is not whether all bundles should be dismantled. Integration can reduce transaction costs, improve coordination, and support valuable forms of solidarity. The issue is whether bundling creates unnecessary coercive leverage or suppresses reasonable forms of differentiated participation.

Layered exit also matters for generative rules. Participants may be able to withdraw from a particular transaction while remaining subject to the rules governing the larger system. They may be able to leave a local organization but not the regulatory infrastructure within which it operates. They may be able to stop using a platform while remaining affected by data already collected. Exit from the immediate relation can therefore coexist with continuing exposure to its institutional residue.

This reinforces the lifecycle point developed in Section 5: termination of one relation does not necessarily remove the structures generated by that relation.

10.7 Collective Exit and Coordination Problems

Some alternatives are available only collectively. Workers can create a cooperative, communities can establish alternative institutions, states can form new international arrangements, and users can migrate to a new technical standard only if enough others move with them. Individual exit may be ineffective because the value of the alternative depends on coordination.

Collective exit introduces difficult justice questions. Coordination requires organization, information, trust, and often substantial resources. Powerful incumbents can exploit these costs by making individual departure possible while making collective alternatives difficult to establish. Network effects, standards, infrastructure ownership, and legal barriers can all contribute to this structure.

Yet collective exit can also impose costs on those who prefer to remain. Secession, mass withdrawal, or institutional fragmentation can redistribute resources and obligations in ways that affect non-participants. The justice of collective exit therefore cannot be reduced to aggregate preference. It requires attention to shared assets, reliance, public goods, minority positions, and the history through which the collective relation was constituted.

The generative perspective adds one further question: does the institutional structure permit the creation of credible alternatives, or does it systematically prevent them from emerging? A system can formally allow competitors while controlling the infrastructure needed for competition. It can permit new associations while making access to financing, data, legal recognition, or communication channels contingent on incumbents. The justice of alternatives therefore includes the conditions under which new relational pathways can be generated.

10.8 Exit and Domination

The connection between exit and domination requires care. Republican theory emphasizes the significance of subjection to arbitrary power even when interference is absent (Pettit 1997). Effective exit can reduce vulnerability to such power, but it is not a complete substitute for non-domination.

A worker who can leave only by abandoning a profession can still be exposed to arbitrary authority. A tenant who can move only at great social and financial cost can remain vulnerable to landlord discretion. A citizen who can emigrate does not thereby lose claims against arbitrary government. An easy exit option can also coexist with domination within the relation if those who stay remain subject to uncontrolled power.

For this reason, the present account treats exit as one dimension of relational freedom. The capacity to refuse, contest, revise, appeal, and participate can be equally important. Effective alternatives matter because they shape dependence and bargaining position, but justice cannot be reduced to the market-like idea that any relation is acceptable if participants can theoretically walk away.

The opposite reduction should also be avoided. Some stable relations legitimately constrain exit because they sustain public goods, long-term commitments, care, or responsibility. The evaluative task concerns the justification, distribution, and history of those constraints.

10.9 Exit after Intervention

Interventions often generate new relations of dependence. A humanitarian actor can provide essential services that become difficult to replace. A regulator can create a compliance infrastructure that organi-

zations must continue to use. A development project can reorganize local economic relations around new funding streams. A technical platform can become indispensable after integrating previously separate functions.

An intervention that is justified at the moment of entry can therefore create later obligations concerning exit. Withdrawal may impose severe harms if the intervening actor has displaced prior alternatives or induced reliance. At the same time, indefinite continuation can entrench authority and dependency.

This problem suggests that exit planning should sometimes be part of the original design of intervention. Relevant questions include whether local or alternative capacities are being preserved, whether responsibilities can be transferred, whether participants understand the conditions of withdrawal, and whether the intervention is increasing or decreasing future dependence on the intervener.

This does not imply that every intervention must restore a hypothetical pre-intervention state. That may be impossible or undesirable. The point is that justice should consider the relation generated by intervention, including the conditions under which the intervener can later reduce or terminate its role.

10.10 When Exit Is Not the Appropriate Remedy

An emphasis on exit can become normatively distorting if it treats departure as the default solution to injustice. Some relations involve claims to inclusion rather than claims to leave. Workers may seek fair conditions rather than resignation. Citizens may seek equal standing rather than emigration. Persons facing discrimination may demand transformation of institutions that they are entitled to inhabit. Members of historically excluded groups may reasonably reject the suggestion that justice consists in finding another institution.

Exit can also externalize costs. If those with resources leave deteriorating public institutions, the remaining participants may face greater burdens. If powerful states withdraw from shared regimes, weaker states may bear the consequences. If professional workers leave disadvantaged regions, local service capacity may decline. The justice of exit therefore includes effects on those who remain.

There are also relations that cannot be fully exited. Historical membership, kinship, ecological interdependence, prior injury, and continuing legal responsibility can survive formal withdrawal. A participant can end direct interaction while remaining responsible for consequences generated earlier.

For these reasons, exit should be treated as one site of relational justice, not as a universal remedy. The question is whether participants possess appropriately structured alternatives and transformative capacities given the kind of relation at stake.

10.11 Effective Alternatives as a Site of Justice

The central claim of this section is limited. Justice should sometimes evaluate not only the terms of a relation but also the effective alternatives surrounding it. Formal permission to leave, refuse, or choose otherwise can be normatively important while remaining insufficient when the relational field makes those options practically inaccessible. Conversely, costly or constrained exit is not automatically unjust; stability, reliance, public obligation, and durable cooperation can justify limits on withdrawal.

The relevant inquiry is therefore relational and historical. It asks how alternatives were produced, who controls the resources required to use them, how exit costs are distributed, whether voice and revision are available within the relation, and whether the system permits credible alternative relations to emerge. It also asks whether interventions, institutions, or contracts progressively narrow future options while continuing to describe participation as voluntary.

This analysis prepares the next section. Effective alternatives matter not only for present freedom but also for the comparison of different relational histories and structures. Section 11 turns to the justice of quotienting and comparison: how relations can be treated as normatively similar or different without erasing the historical and structural distinctions that matter to judgment.

11 Justice of Quotienting and Comparison

Justice requires comparison. Claims of equal treatment, unequal burden, analogous precedent, discriminatory distinction, proportional response, and historical rectification all depend on treating some cases as sufficiently similar for a specified purpose while treating other differences as normatively relevant. Yet no two relational histories are identical in every respect. Comparison therefore requires abstraction. The difficulty is that abstraction can clarify a justice claim while also erasing the very history, dependency, constraint, or asymmetry that makes the claim intelligible.

This section develops a limited account of the *justice of quotienting*: the justice questions that arise when institutions, theories, or decision makers specify which differences are to count and which may be ignored for a particular comparison. The argument does not oppose abstraction. Law, policy, social inquiry, and ordinary judgment would become impossible without some form of equivalence construction. Nor does it claim that every historical difference deserves normative weight. The narrower claim is that a comparison inherits normative consequences from the rule by which relevant similarity is constructed. Where that rule suppresses differences that are constitutive of the relation being judged, apparently equal comparison can reproduce substantive inequality. Where it preserves every difference, by contrast, comparison can collapse into unstructured particularism.

11.1 Comparison Requires an Object of Equivalence

A justice judgment cannot compare “everything” about two relations at once. It must identify an object of comparison. Depending on the question, the relevant object may be a present distribution, a procedure, an effective option set, a relational trajectory, an institutional role, a lifecycle phase, or a rule governing future transformation.

Let $\mathcal{X}$ denote a formally specified domain of comparison and let $\sim_Q$ be an equivalence relation defined for a particular analytical purpose. The quotient space is

$$\mathcal{X}/\sim_Q. \tag{7}$$

Equation (7) makes the comparison structure explicit. This notation is deliberately modest. It does not suggest that legal or ethical judgment is reducible to algebra. It identifies a formal fact about comparison: treating two objects as equivalent requires a rule that determines which differences are ignored for the purpose at hand.

The subscript Q emphasizes that equivalence is indexed to a quotienting rule. Two employment relations can be equivalent with respect to salary while differing in exit costs, immigration dependence, bargaining power, or historical coercion. Two humanitarian interventions can be equivalent with respect to immediate mortality reduction while differing in the institutional authority they create. Two political settlements can be equivalent with respect to formal voting rights while differing in the historical processes that produced current resource distributions.

The relevant question is therefore not whether two relations are simply “the same.” It is what kind of sameness is being asserted, for which purpose, and with which excluded dimensions.

11.2 Relevant Difference and Normative Purpose

A difference does not become normatively relevant merely because it exists. Height, language, ancestry, prior institutional membership, duration of participation, and causal contribution may matter in one context and be irrelevant in another. The justice problem concerns the justification of relevance.

Purpose matters here. A public health comparison may reasonably ignore differences that would be central to a criminal responsibility judgment. A compensation scheme may focus on causal contribution and loss while a democratic procedure focuses on standing and equal participation. A legal rule may intentionally abstract from wealth, race, religion, or social status in order to protect equal treatment. The same act of abstraction can therefore be either protective or distorting depending on what the institution is trying to decide and what consequences follow from the comparison.

This is why the justice of quotienting cannot be governed by a simple rule demanding maximal detail. More detailed representation is not always fairer. Excessive differentiation can reproduce privilege, undermine general rights, or allow institutions to manufacture bespoke reasons for unequal treatment. Conversely, coarse comparison can erase dependency, historical exclusion, disability, colonial dispossession, or other features that are necessary to understand what equal treatment would require.

The problem is best stated as a question of fit between the normative purpose of comparison and the differences preserved by the quotienting rule.

11.3 State Similarity and Historical Difference

The earlier sections argued that relational states can appear similar while having different genealogies. Quotienting makes this issue explicit. A state-centered comparison may treat two relations as equivalent because their current observable structures match along selected dimensions. A genealogical comparison may distinguish them because one relation was formed through coercion, exclusion, or uncompensated appropriation while the other was not.

Neither comparison is automatically superior. A present-oriented institution may have good reasons to disregard some historical differences. Equal citizenship, for example, can require refusing to reproduce inherited rank. At the same time, ignoring history can make present equality merely formal where historical processes continue to structure effective alternatives, wealth, authority, or recognition.

Historical relevance therefore depends on persistence. The question is not simply whether the histories differ, but whether those differences remain constitutive of the present relation or of the claims under consideration. Section 4 described this as the difference between merely causal ancestry and constitutive genealogy. The same distinction disciplines quotienting. A historically indexed quotient should preserve a past difference when that difference continues to organize present burdens, powers, dependencies, or claims; it need not preserve historical variation that has no credible relevance to the current justice question.

This avoids two opposite errors. One is historical erasure, in which present similarity is allowed to cancel a still-operative history. The other is genealogical fixation, in which every inherited difference is treated as permanently normatively decisive.

11.4 Comparison across Relational Lifecycles

Relations can also be miscompared because they are observed at different lifecycle positions. Formation, maintenance, modification, suspension, exit, and removal create distinct normative questions. A newly formed dependency should not necessarily be compared with a mature institution as though both were at the same stage. Likewise, the burdens associated with leaving a relation may look different depending on whether the relation was voluntarily entered, inherited, imposed, or generated by prior intervention.

Lifecycle-sensitive comparison requires the decision maker to identify what is being held constant. A comparison of formation conditions asks whether entry, consent, initial bargaining positions, and available alternatives were sufficiently alike. A comparison of maintenance asks whether continuing burdens and benefits are distributed under similar structures of control. A comparison of exit asks whether participants face comparable effective alternatives and residual obligations.

Without this temporal indexing, institutions can generate misleading equivalence. Two participants may face the same written exit rule while one has developed deep dependence over decades and the other entered only recently. Two communities may be subject to the same reconstruction policy while one is rebuilding infrastructure destroyed by an external actor and the other is receiving ordinary development assistance. The formal rule is shared, but the relational position is not.

Lifecycle analysis does not require a unique taxonomy for every domain. It requires only that comparisons avoid treating temporal location as invisible when it is plausibly constitutive of the burdens or claims being evaluated.

11.5 Quotienting Trajectories and Generative Rules

The object of comparison can extend beyond present states to trajectories and generative rules. This matters when justice concerns not only where participants are now but how their relational possibilities are changing.

Suppose two institutional reforms produce similar short-term distributions. If one reform decentralizes amendment authority while the other centralizes it, a state-based quotient may classify them as equivalent while a rule-sensitive comparison distinguishes them. Section 8 formalized this issue by representing action as a transformation of both R_t and F_t . A comparison focused only on R_{t+1} can therefore suppress differences in future transformability.

The same point applies to effective alternatives. Two relations may provide the same current benefit while differing sharply in the participant's future capacity to refuse, revise, or exit. A comparison that ignores these differences may be adequate for one policy question and inadequate for another.

A generative-relational comparison can therefore take several formally distinct objects: present relational configurations, reconstructed histories, effective option sets, trajectories, or transition structures. The justice question is not answered by choosing the most temporally extensive object in every case. The task is to choose an object whose retained dimensions correspond to the normative issue under examination.

11.6 False Equivalence and False Difference

Quotienting can fail in two directions. *False equivalence* occurs when materially or relationally significant differences are suppressed so that unlike cases are treated as alike. *False difference* occurs when irrelevant distinctions are elevated so that comparable cases receive different treatment.

False equivalence is familiar in formally uniform policies that ignore unequal dependence or unequal ability to satisfy the same requirement. A rule requiring identical documentation can burden actors differently when access to documentation is historically unequal. A nominally equal exit clause can conceal radically different effective alternatives. A uniform sanction can have different relational effects depending on wealth, dependency, or institutional position.

False difference is equally important. Institutions can multiply categories in ways that legitimate exclusion, differential surveillance, or unequal access. Historical narratives can be selectively invoked to portray some cases as exceptional while treating comparable harms elsewhere as ordinary. Claims of cultural, technological, or organizational uniqueness can sometimes function as devices for avoiding standards that would otherwise apply.

The justice of comparison therefore has a dual requirement: preserve differences that are relevant to the normative purpose, and resist distinctions whose primary effect is to exempt comparable cases from appropriate scrutiny. The difficulty lies precisely in the fact that relevance is contestable.

11.7 Precedent, Analogy, and Institutional Comparison

Law makes the politics of quotienting unusually visible. Precedent depends on identifying which features of an earlier case are material to a later case. No two disputes are identical, so analogical reasoning necessarily constructs similarity. The selection of legally relevant facts determines whether a precedent appears controlling, distinguishable, or irrelevant.

The present framework does not offer a new theory of precedent. It uses precedent to illustrate a general point: comparison is an interpretive practice with institutional consequences. A court, regulator, humanitarian organization, or administrative agency can shape justice by determining which features count as analogous. The reasoning may be publicly contestable and constrained by doctrine, but it still performs a quotienting function.

Historical and relational information can be especially vulnerable in this process. If doctrine recognizes only the immediate transaction, longer histories of dependence can disappear from the comparison.

Conversely, an institution can over-historicize cases by invoking background differences that have little bearing on the rule being applied. Sound comparison therefore requires explicit justification of the dimensions treated as material.

This is closely related to equal-treatment reasoning. Equality does not require that every person or relation be represented identically in all respects. It requires an account of which differences justify differentiated treatment and which do not. The generative-relational contribution is to insist that histories, effective alternatives, lifecycle positions, and transformation rules can sometimes belong among those potentially relevant differences.

11.8 Capability, Effective Alternatives, and Comparison

The capability approach provides an instructive parallel because it shifts attention from nominal resources to what persons are effectively able to do and be (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2006). This makes comparison sensitive to conversion factors and heterogeneous circumstances rather than assuming that equal resources generate equal opportunity.

The present account shares the concern with effective alternatives developed in Section 10 but extends it to relational histories and transformation structures. Two participants with the same formal entitlement may occupy different relational positions because one depends on infrastructure controlled by the other, one has credible exit options, or one bears costs generated by an earlier institutional transformation.

Yet capability-sensitive comparison also illustrates the danger of expanding the comparison object without limit. Every additional contextual factor increases descriptive richness but can also make common judgment harder. A workable justice inquiry therefore needs a principled stopping rule. The relevant question is whether excluding a difference would materially distort the normative issue under review, not whether the difference can be described.

11.9 Who Controls the Quotienting Rule?

The justice of quotienting is inseparable from institutional power. Someone or some process determines the comparison domain, the relevant dimensions, the evidentiary thresholds, and the categories through which similarity is represented. These decisions may be distributed across legislators, courts, administrative systems, technical standards, professional communities, statistical practices, and affected participants.

Control over quotienting does not by itself establish injustice. Institutions need authority to define administrable categories and comparison rules. The problem becomes sharper when actors affected by a quotient have little ability to challenge the differences it suppresses, especially where the comparison allocates rights, burdens, recognition, compensation, or authority.

Contestability therefore matters. A comparison regime is more accountable when participants can ask why a particular difference was ignored, introduce evidence that the difference is relevant, and challenge categories that systematically erase their relational position. This does not require every challenge to succeed. It requires that the rule of comparison itself remain open to reasoned scrutiny rather than being treated as a neutral background fact.

The importance of contestability also varies with stakes. A rough quotient may be acceptable for exploratory analysis and unacceptable for irreversible deprivation. High-stakes comparison creates stronger reasons for transparency about the dimensions preserved and suppressed.

11.10 Revision and Historical Change in Quotienting

Quotienting rules are themselves historical. Differences once treated as irrelevant can become central to justice, while distinctions once treated as fundamental can lose normative legitimacy. Developments in disability justice, gender equality, racial justice, labor law, and recognition politics all illustrate changes in what institutions are prepared to regard as a relevant difference.

This temporal variability does not mean that relevance is arbitrary. It means that comparison rules are situated within evolving interpretive and normative institutions. New evidence, concepts, social movements, and institutional experience can reveal that an apparently neutral quotient systematically suppressed important structure.

For a generative-relational framework, this implies that comparison regimes should sometimes preserve enough information to permit later re-evaluation. If an archive retains only the quotient output and discards the distinctions that were collapsed, future actors may be unable to reconstruct whether the original comparison was justified. This links the justice of quotienting to re-cognizability without making maximal data preservation a universal requirement.

Revision also requires caution. Later conceptual resources should not be projected backward as though earlier actors necessarily possessed them. A revised quotient can improve present understanding of a historical relation without automatically resolving questions of retrospective responsibility.

11.11 Comparison without Maximal Particularism

The main danger of a justice-of-quotienting framework is that it can become an argument against generalization. If every relational history is treated as incomparable, law and policy lose the capacity to formulate common rules. If every difference is potentially relevant, equality becomes analytically indeterminate.

This section rejects that conclusion. Quotienting is unavoidable and often desirable. General rights, anti-discrimination rules, public standards, precedents, statistical comparisons, and institutional procedures all depend on justified abstraction. The aim is not to escape quotienting but to make its normative role visible.

A disciplined comparison should therefore ask four questions. What object is being compared? For what normative purpose? Which differences are being suppressed? Would preserving any of those differences materially alter the justice judgment? These questions do not mechanically generate an answer, but they expose where disagreement actually lies.

The resulting position is intermediate between formal sameness and unrestricted particularism. It permits common judgment while recognizing that relational history, effective alternatives, lifecycle position, and future transformation capacity can sometimes make formally similar cases normatively different.

11.12 Conclusion: Comparison as a Site of Justice

Comparison is not an innocent step that occurs after the morally relevant facts have already been identified. The construction of similarity helps determine which facts become relevant to the judgment. This is especially important in a framework of relational becoming because the object being compared may include not only a present state but also a genealogy, lifecycle position, effective alternatives, trajectory, or generative rule.

The justice of quotienting therefore concerns the justification of abstraction. It asks whether a comparison preserves the differences needed for its normative purpose, whether it introduces distinctions that improperly exempt comparable cases, who has authority to define the quotienting rule, and whether affected participants can contest it. None of these questions implies that maximal differentiation is preferable. They instead make explicit the normative work performed by comparison itself.

This prepares the prospective problem developed next. Once relations are compared not only by present states but also by their future possibilities, justice must confront regions of relational futures that are not yet realized. Section 12 therefore turns to prospective justice and future relational regions.

12 Prospective Justice and Future Relational Regions

Justice of relational becoming is prospective whenever present decisions are assessed partly in light of the relations that they make more or less reachable. This prospective standpoint is related to, but distinct

from, the long-horizon consequence analysis developed in Section 7. Long-horizon analysis asks what later effects a present action may generate. Prospective justice asks a broader structural question: what kinds of future relational configurations remain effectively available after the present decision, which ones become difficult or impossible to reach, and how control over those future pathways is distributed.

This distinction matters because the future significance of an action is not exhausted by a prediction of its most likely outcome. Two interventions can have similar expected short-term consequences while leaving very different fields of future possibility. One may preserve several credible arrangements, amendment routes, and forms of exit. Another may make one institutional configuration increasingly difficult to dislodge. A third may open possibilities that were previously unavailable while simultaneously foreclosing others. Prospective justice therefore concerns the structure of future relational possibility, not only forecasted welfare or expected consequences.

The argument does not presume that justice requires maximal openness. Durable commitments can be justified. Some forms of domination, exploitation, or arbitrary interference should become harder rather than easier to reproduce. Some rights are valuable partly because they constrain later majorities or officeholders. The relevant question is therefore not whether present action leaves the largest number of futures open. It is whether the pattern of future accessibility, closure, and steering power can be normatively justified in light of the interests, histories, authorities, risks, and effective alternatives at stake.

12.1 From Predicted Outcomes to Reachable Relational Regions

A prediction selects or ranks anticipated futures. A future relational region describes a set of relational configurations that remain effectively reachable from the present under specified constraints and a specified horizon. The distinction is useful because justice inquiry often needs to know more than what analysts think will probably happen. It may also matter whether participants retain credible routes toward revision, exit, institutional replacement, redistribution of authority, restoration of lost capacities, or other forms of relational change.

Let $\mathcal{S}$ denote a space of relational configurations relevant to a specified inquiry. For a present configuration R_t , a generative structure F_t , and a finite horizon T , define a reachable relational region by

$$\mathcal{R}_{t,T}^{\text{reach}}(R_t, F_t) := \{R_{t+\tau} \in \mathcal{S} \mid 0 < \tau \leq T \text{ and } R_{t+\tau} \text{ is effectively reachable under } F_t\}. \quad (8)$$

Equation (8) defines the future relational region used in this section. This set is not intended as a complete model of the social future. Its content depends on the purpose of inquiry, the horizon, the specification of effective reachability, and the granularity at which relational configurations are represented. It is therefore an analytical construction rather than an ontological inventory of all possible worlds.

The term *region* is useful because future justice questions frequently concern more than isolated alternatives. A participant may have access to a family of arrangements with similar authority structures but no credible route toward arrangements with independent review. A community may retain many policy choices while all of them depend on the same infrastructural gatekeeper. An organization may permit repeated changes in personnel while leaving the underlying distribution of veto power untouched. A large number of nominal futures can therefore coexist with a narrow relational region.

Conversely, a system with relatively few formal options can still preserve meaningful relational variation if the available alternatives differ in the dimensions that matter to participants. Prospective justice should therefore resist counting futures. The normative issue concerns the structure and significance of the reachable region, including who can access which parts of it and what costs are attached to movement within it.

12.2 Effective Reachability

The word *reachable* requires the same discipline developed earlier for effective alternatives. A future relation is not effectively reachable merely because no law or formal rule prohibits it. Resources, knowledge,

infrastructure, coordination capacity, legal standing, time, physical safety, and institutional endurance can all determine whether a pathway is practically available.

This makes prospective justice sensitive to background conditions. A formal right to create an alternative institution may have little significance if all relevant data, licences, funding channels, or communication infrastructure remain controlled by the incumbent. A nominal right to leave a political or economic relation may not preserve a meaningful future if exit destroys access to housing, livelihood, identity documents, or social membership. A constitutional amendment route may exist while being practically inaccessible to actors without concentrated resources.

Effective reachability is also actor-relative. One participant may be able to move the relation toward a new region at low cost while another can do so only through extraordinary sacrifice. Prospective analysis should therefore ask not only which relational configurations are reachable in the abstract, but whose agency can make them reachable and whose cooperation, acquiescence, or endurance is required.

The capability approach is relevant here because it directs attention away from nominal resources or permissions toward substantive opportunities (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2006). The present framework extends that concern from an individual's current capability set to the relational configurations that participants can credibly help generate over time. This extension remains analytical rather than doctrinal: it does not imply that capability theory must adopt the vocabulary of relational regions, or that all future relational possibilities should be valued equally.

12.3 Branching Power and the Distribution of Future Steering Capacity

Future relational regions have a distributional structure. Participants can differ not only in which futures they would prefer, but in their capacity to steer the relation toward some regions rather than others. Some actors can initiate amendments, control agendas, finance transitions, set technical standards, withhold cooperation, exercise vetoes, or survive periods of institutional instability. Others may have voice only after a pathway has already been selected.

This suggests a prospective question about *branching power*: who has effective influence over the points at which relational trajectories can diverge? Branching power need not be centralized. Different actors can control different transitions, and some transitions can depend on collective coordination. The concept is not intended to replace existing accounts of political, economic, institutional, or infrastructural power. Its purpose is narrower: to identify control over the accessibility of future relational regions as one possible object of justice.

Branching power can be hidden by formally symmetrical procedures. Every participant may possess the same formal right to propose change while only one can afford the evidential, legal, organizational, or technical costs required to place an alternative on the agenda. Every member may possess a vote while one actor controls which options become votable. A platform may permit competing applications while one actor controls the interface standards on which all applications depend. Prospective justice should therefore examine the practical distribution of steering capacity, not only formal competence.

This concern overlaps with republican analysis of domination. Exposure to uncontrolled power can matter even when interference has not yet occurred (Pettit 1997). A prospective relational account adds a temporal focus: control over which future arrangements remain reachable can be significant even when the current relation appears tolerable. An actor may refrain from present interference while retaining unilateral power to close alternatives later. The justice question then concerns the structure of dependence and future vulnerability, not merely present conduct.

12.4 Closure, Lock-In, and Foreclosed Regions

Some present decisions make portions of the future relational field effectively unreachable. Institutions disappear, knowledge is lost, ecosystems are transformed, technical standards become incompatible, communities disperse, alternative infrastructures decay, or legal authority becomes concentrated in ways that are difficult to reverse. Such closure can be intentional or emergent.

Path-dependence research helps explain how increasing returns, institutional complementarity, learning effects, and coordination costs can make reversal progressively more difficult (Pierson 2000; Mahoney 2000). Prospective justice asks when this increasing difficulty is normatively important. The answer cannot be that every foreclosed possibility is an injustice. Decisions necessarily exclude alternatives. Commitment itself would be impossible if all paths had to remain equally open.

The more precise issue is which regions are being closed, who bears the loss, who authorized the closure, how foreseeable the closure was, whether less restrictive pathways were available, and what reasons justify the resulting rigidity. Closing a future pathway toward arbitrary domination can be protective. Closing all credible pathways out of dependency can be objectionable. Lock-in therefore has no fixed normative sign.

Irreversibility increases the importance of this inquiry because mistakes become harder to repair. The relevant concern is not only physical irreversibility. Institutional, epistemic, and economic irreversibility can also matter. A governance structure may be legally revisable yet practically irreversible once alternative expertise has disappeared. A classification system may be formally amendable yet historically entrenched across interoperable databases. A dependency relation may be terminable in principle while the capacities needed for independence have been allowed to atrophy.

Prospective justice should therefore treat the production of irreversibility as a distinct reason for scrutiny, especially where those most affected have weak influence over the decision that creates it.

12.5 Future Participants and Temporally Distributed Standing

Prospective evaluation often concerns persons or participants who are not yet present at the moment of decision. Future members of an institution, later generations, successor communities, future users of an infrastructure, and entities whose interests become recognizable only later can all inherit relational structures they did not choose.

This raises difficult questions of standing. The present paper does not propose a complete theory of obligations to future persons. Nor does it assume that every possible future participant has an equal claim against present action. The narrower point is that current decisions can distribute authority, dependency, burdens, and effective alternatives across time. Where these effects are predictable enough to matter, the absence of future participants from present procedures creates a representational problem that should not be ignored merely because direct consent is impossible.

Several institutional responses are possible: trusteeship, fiduciary duties, constitutional constraints, environmental safeguards, review requirements, delayed implementation, periodic reopening, or preservation of institutional alternatives. None is universally appropriate. Each can itself create authority and representation problems. Prospective justice therefore needs to evaluate not only the interests attributed to future participants but also the legitimacy of those who claim to represent them.

The issue becomes particularly complex under changing interpretation. Future participants may reject the categories through which present actors describe their interests. A policy justified as preserving opportunity can later be understood as preserving one historically specific conception of valuable life. This is another reason to distinguish preservation of future capacity from preservation of a predetermined future plan.

12.6 Prospective Justice without Maximizing Optionality

A language of future regions can easily slide into a maximization principle: the more futures preserved, the more just the present decision. This paper rejects that inference. Justice can require closure. Rights constrain options. Environmental protection can forbid destructive uses. Anti-corruption rules can narrow institutional discretion. Long-term cooperation can require credible commitment. Safety can require eliminating certain pathways altogether.

The prospective question is therefore not how to maximize optionality but how to justify its distribution and restriction. Some actors may need protection against another actor's option to dominate them.

Some communities may rationally choose durable commitments that reduce later flexibility. Some institutional designs may preserve many formal alternatives while leaving all important pathways under one actor's control.

A more defensible inquiry asks which forms of future transformability should remain available, to whom, for what purposes, and under what conditions of review. It also asks which closures are necessary to secure justified commitments. This approach is compatible with value pluralism because different normative theories can supply different reasons for preserving or closing particular regions.

The concept of a future relational region therefore functions as an object of evaluation, not as an independent value metric. It helps specify what a present decision leaves structurally possible. It does not determine which of those possibilities deserve protection.

12.7 Prospective Justice and Changes in Generative Rules

The analysis of future regions is closely connected to Section 8. A change in F_t can reshape the reachable region even when the immediate relational state changes little. An amendment rule, technical dependency, new veto, resource monopoly, review mechanism, or exit condition can make whole classes of later configurations easier or harder to reach.

This connection clarifies why second-order transformation matters. A present reform can leave current distributions mostly intact while redistributing control over future branching points. Conversely, a substantial present redistribution can be accompanied by institutions that preserve broad future contestability. Prospective justice should therefore examine both the visible relational outcome and the altered structure of reachability.

The formal action mapping introduced in Equation (1) remains useful here. The prospective question concerns the difference between the future regions supported by the two generative structures, under an explicitly chosen horizon and an explicitly justified representation of relational state. The analysis need not calculate these regions exactly. In most social settings that would be impossible. The formalism clarifies the object of inquiry: present action can alter the topology of effective future possibilities even before later consequences are observed.

This is also where authority becomes important. An actor may have authority to improve a present condition without having authority to close major future pathways or redesign amendment structures. Prospective evaluation therefore interacts with the authority analysis of Section 9. The more extensive the effect on future relational regions, the stronger the reason to examine the scope and duration of the authority under which that effect is produced.

12.8 Risk, Uncertainty, and Robust Prospective Judgment

Future regions cannot be known with certainty. Social systems are adaptive, innovations occur, political coalitions change, exogenous shocks intervene, and participants create pathways that no present model anticipates. Prospective justice must therefore avoid turning scenario analysis into false prediction.

One response is to distinguish forecast confidence from structural vulnerability. An analyst may be unable to predict which future arrangement will occur while still having good reason to believe that a decision concentrates veto power, destroys an alternative institution, creates a single point of infrastructural dependency, or makes exit substantially more costly. These are prospective facts about the structure of possibility even when the realized trajectory remains uncertain.

A second response is to use multiple scenarios rather than a single expected future. Scenarios can reveal whether a decision is acceptable only under optimistic assumptions or whether it remains defensible across several plausible trajectories. The aim is not to identify the true future in advance but to test the sensitivity of a justice judgment to uncertainty.

A third response is to examine robustness of protection. Where uncertainty is high and stakes are asymmetric, institutions may preserve review, reversibility, redundancy, or independent oversight so that later information can alter the course of action. These features can be valuable because they reduce the cost of epistemic error. Yet they also have costs and should not be treated as universal requirements.

Prospective judgment should therefore be proportionate to evidential support. The framework is strongest where there are identifiable mechanisms connecting present design to later accessibility. It is weakest where future-region claims rest primarily on imaginative speculation.

12.9 Future Relational Regions and Repair

Prospective justice is not only preventive. It can also guide repair. A relation damaged by earlier decisions may require more than compensation for present loss. Repair can involve reopening regions that have become inaccessible: rebuilding independent institutions, restoring knowledge, reducing exit costs, recreating collective capacity, returning authority, or re-establishing avenues for contestation.

This perspective helps explain why some remedies feel incomplete even after material compensation. If an earlier injustice destroyed a community's capacity to govern a resource, a payment may address one dimension of loss while leaving the altered relational region intact. If discrimination excluded a group from a profession over generations, equal formal access today may not recreate the networks, expertise, or institutional trust that disappeared during exclusion. If a temporary intervention displaced local decision-making capacity, withdrawal alone may not restore the earlier field of possibilities.

Repair should not be understood as returning history to a counterfactual state that can be perfectly reconstructed. Earlier possibilities may be unrecoverable, and participants may not want restoration of the previous relation. The prospective aim is more modest: identify which future relational capacities remain unjustifiably restricted by the legacy of earlier transformation and whether credible forms of repair can enlarge or reorganize the reachable region.

This anticipates Section 14, which will address repair, revision, and re-generation more directly.

12.10 Limits of Prospective Justice

The prospective standpoint has serious limits. First, it can privilege imagined futures over actual present suffering. Second, it can be manipulated rhetorically: powerful actors often justify present burdens by invoking speculative long-term benefits. Third, analysts can mistake their own preferred social model for a neutral account of valuable future possibility. Fourth, the concept of a relational region can become so broad that every decision appears to transform the entire future.

These risks require discipline. The region must be purpose-specific. Claims about closure should identify plausible mechanisms. The analysis should distinguish effective from merely logical possibility. It should disclose whose perspective defines the relevant dimensions of relational state. It should avoid treating uncertainty as a licence for limitless precaution. It should also remain open to the possibility that a present decision is justified even though it closes some future pathways.

A further limit concerns comparability across time. Future participants can value different relationships, institutions, and forms of agency. Prospective justice should therefore be cautious about preserving specific present preferences as though they were timeless. The stronger case often concerns preservation of capacities for later contestation, revision, association, exit, or collective self-organization rather than preservation of one substantive future arrangement.

Finally, prospective analysis does not settle responsibility. A present decision may have objectionable future consequences without every participant in the decision bearing equal responsibility for them. Responsibility depends on authority, knowledge, causal contribution, available alternatives, institutional role, and other considerations developed elsewhere in the paper.

12.11 Future Relational Regions as a Candidate Object of Justice

The concept of a future relational region extends the paper's temporal-generative framework without converting openness into a supreme norm. Present relations are situated within fields of effective future reachability. Actions can alter those fields by changing resources, institutions, rules of revision, infrastructures, forms of dependency, and capacities for coordination or exit. These changes can distribute future steering power unevenly and can create forms of closure that are difficult to reverse.

Prospective justice therefore asks more than what present actors expect to happen. It asks what relational futures remain credibly reachable, who can steer movement among them, which regions have been closed, and whether the resulting pattern of accessibility and rigidity can be justified. This perspective complements consequence analysis, capability analysis, domination analysis, and historical inquiry while remaining distinct from each.

The next section turns from prospective judgment to a different temporal problem. Later evidence, concepts, and interpretive resources can alter how past relational transformations are understood. Section 13 therefore examines retrospective reinterpretation and the limits of historical responsibility under changing conditions of knowledge.

13 Retrospective Reinterpretation and Historical Responsibility

The temporal framework developed so far has moved from relational genealogy to present judgment and then toward future relational regions. A further problem appears when the direction of inquiry reverses. Later evidence, concepts, institutions, and interpretive resources can make a past relation newly intelligible. Practices once described as ordinary administration can later be reconstructed as exclusionary. A relation once represented as voluntary can later appear as structured by dependence. An intervention once regarded as temporary can later be understood as having reorganized authority for decades. These retrospective changes in intelligibility matter for justice, but they create a danger of temporal collapse: the standards and knowledge available to later interpreters can be projected backward as though they had been equally available to earlier actors.

This section develops a more disciplined account of retrospective judgment. It distinguishes the reconstruction of a past relation from the attribution of responsibility to actors who participated in that relation. It asks what later interpreters may legitimately learn from new evidence and new concepts, what information was reasonably available at the time of action, how inherited institutions can remain unjust even when their present members did not originate them, and how responsibility can persist or change across institutional succession. The central claim is modest. Historical reinterpretation can alter the object of justice without mechanically rewriting the responsibility of every past participant. Retrospective justice therefore requires both openness to new recognition and restraint against hindsight-based attribution.

13.1 Retrospective Judgment as a Reconstructive Standpoint

A past relation is never available to later interpreters in exactly the form in which it was lived. What remains are traces: records, material arrangements, testimony, institutional rules, demographic patterns, technologies, artifacts, later recollections, and the consequences sedimented into subsequent relations. Retrospective judgment therefore begins with reconstruction rather than direct observation.

For a past time t and a later interpretive time τ , let $\hat{H}_{\leq t}^{[\tau]}$ denote the reconstructed relational history available at τ for the period up to t . The notation does not imply that history itself changes when interpretation changes. It marks a difference between the historical processes that occurred and the later evidential-conceptual configuration through which those processes are reconstructed.

This distinction is important because later reconstructions can improve in several ways. New archives can become available. Previously excluded testimony can enter the record. Statistical methods can reveal patterns that isolated observers could not see. New legal or ethical concepts can make a previously unnamed relational structure intelligible. Technical knowledge can reveal environmental, medical, or computational consequences that earlier investigators could not detect. None of these developments guarantees that the later interpretation is correct, but each can legitimately reopen a settled account.

Retrospective justice therefore should not treat earlier descriptions as permanently authoritative merely because they were contemporaneous. Contemporaries can be constrained by ideology, institutional power, missing evidence, suppressed testimony, or conceptual poverty. At the same time, later interpreters are not epistemically privileged simply because they come later. They can inherit their own

distortions, simplify past worlds through present categories, or confuse a newly available vocabulary with complete access to historical meaning.

The appropriate posture is neither historical deference nor retrospective supremacy. It is reconstructive comparison across interpretive moments.

13.2 Later Concepts and Newly Intelligible Harms

Some historical changes in judgment arise because later communities possess concepts that were not institutionally available, widely shared, or politically actionable at the earlier time. Terms for discrimination, coercive dependence, environmental damage, psychological injury, structural exclusion, or algorithmic manipulation can make relational patterns visible in ways that earlier administrative vocabularies did not.

This phenomenon is especially important for a theory of relational becoming. A concept does not merely add a new label to a fixed historical object. It can change which units are compared, which temporal horizon is relevant, which dependencies are treated as consequential, and which background conditions are counted as part of the relation. A later concept can therefore support a different reconstruction of what the relation was.

Yet conceptual novelty alone cannot establish historical wrongness. A concept may illuminate a feature that was always ethically relevant, or it may impose a later evaluative architecture on a past practice whose participants operated under different meanings and constraints. The task is to determine whether the later concept identifies relational effects, asymmetries, burdens, or exclusions that are sufficiently supported by the historical evidence and sufficiently relevant to the normative question under review.

This is one reason the paper's earlier analysis of quotienting matters. A later interpreter may reject an earlier comparison rule that treated significant differences as irrelevant. Historical categories may have grouped formally different cases together or separated structurally similar cases. Reinterpretation can therefore involve revision of the quotient through which the past was classified. Such revision can be justified, but it should be explicit about which historical differences are being restored and why they matter.

The possibility of later conceptual improvement also strengthens the importance of re-cognizability. If present institutions preserve only conclusions and discard the underlying relational traces, future interpreters may be unable to test whether today's categories remain adequate. Historical justice is therefore partly dependent on the epistemic conditions under which later reconstruction remains possible.

13.3 Historical Reinterpretation and Responsibility Attribution

A central distinction follows. A later community may have strong reasons to reinterpret a past relation while having much weaker reasons to attribute blame to particular actors who participated in it.

Responsibility attribution normally depends on considerations that are more specific than the quality of the later reconstruction. Relevant factors can include an actor's authority, causal contribution, knowledge, foreseeable consequences, available alternatives, institutional role, coercive constraints, and ability to contest the relation. These factors must be reconstructed as far as possible from the actor's historical position rather than simply read off from the interpreter's later knowledge.

This separation is necessary because the same historical relation can support several different judgments. A practice can now be judged unjust. Its victims or successors can have valid claims for recognition or repair. Present institutions can have reasons to discontinue or transform inherited arrangements. Yet an individual actor who participated in the practice under severe informational and institutional constraints may bear limited personal culpability. Conversely, an actor can bear substantial responsibility even where the surrounding society lacked today's terminology if evidence shows that the actor understood the relevant harm, suppressed objections, manipulated dependence, or exploited an asymmetry that was already recognizable at the time.

The point is not to insulate historical actors from criticism. It is to prevent a change in historical interpretation from being treated as a complete theory of responsibility.

This distinction is compatible with debates over historical injustice and rectification. Nozick's historical entitlement framework, Waldron's argument about the possible supersession of some historical injustices, and Butt's account of rectificatory duties all show in different ways that the moral significance of past injustice cannot be reduced to present distribution alone (Nozick 1974; Waldron 1992; Butt 2008). The present framework adds a relational-temporal question: how should responsibility be allocated when the very interpretation of the relation changes across time?

13.4 The Epistemic Position of the Historical Actor

Retrospective judgment requires reconstruction of what an actor could reasonably know, not only what later observers know. This does not mean accepting every historically common belief as exculpatory. Social normalization can itself be sustained by power, selective evidence, exclusion of testimony, or deliberate ignorance. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether a belief was widespread but what epistemic resources, warnings, counterexamples, and opportunities for inquiry were accessible to the actor.

Several forms of ignorance should be distinguished in prose rather than collapsed into one category. Some ignorance is unavoidable because the relevant evidence or concepts did not yet exist. Some is institutionally produced because records, testimony, or expertise were systematically excluded. Some is strategic because actors avoid information that would threaten their interests. Some is culpable because warning signs were available and inquiry was reasonably required by the actor's role. Some is induced by dependency or hierarchy, where subordinate actors have little opportunity to challenge the dominant interpretation.

These distinctions matter because retrospective responsibility should be sensitive to the genealogy of ignorance itself. If an institution controlled the archive, defined admissible evidence, excluded affected participants from testimony, and then claimed that the harm was unknowable, the ignorance is not normatively equivalent to ignorance produced by genuine limits of historical knowledge. The same applies when a powerful actor benefits from maintaining an interpretive environment in which adverse effects remain difficult to recognize.

The analysis therefore connects historical responsibility with the paper's broader concern for generative rules. Epistemic opportunity is partly structured by institutions. Authority over records, investigation, classification, and dissent can shape what historical actors are able to know. Responsibility may consequently attach not only to the immediate action but also to participation in maintaining an epistemic structure that predictably suppresses relevant knowledge.

13.5 Standards of Judgment and the Problem of Hindsight

Hindsight introduces at least two risks. The first is epistemic: later observers know which consequences actually occurred and can therefore overestimate how predictable those consequences were beforehand. The second is normative: later observers can assume that contemporary standards were fully available, authoritative, and action-guiding in the earlier context.

Avoiding hindsight does not require moral relativism. Some standards can legitimately be applied retrospectively, especially where the underlying reasons were accessible through concepts already available at the time, where affected participants articulated objections, or where the conduct violated norms that the actor or institution itself professed. The difficulty lies in determining when later judgment identifies an enduring reason and when it simply substitutes a new historical vocabulary for the practical horizon of earlier actors.

A useful discipline is to separate three questions. First, how should the relation be evaluated now, given the best current reconstruction? Second, what could relevant actors reasonably recognize at the time? Third, what forms of response are appropriate now, given the current consequences and the present distribution of responsibility? These questions interact, but none can be replaced by another.

This approach is particularly important where institutions later acknowledge harms that were contested or ignored when they occurred. Present recognition can be warranted even if responsibility among

past individuals was heterogeneous. Institutional apology, restitution, reform, or memorialization need not presuppose identical blame across every historical participant.

13.6 Institutional Continuity and Inherited Responsibility

Historical responsibility becomes more difficult when the relevant actor is not an individual but an institution that persists across generations. States, corporations, universities, religious organizations, professional bodies, and administrative agencies can survive changes in personnel while continuing to hold assets, authority, records, privileges, obligations, and relational positions generated in the past.

The persistence of an institution creates a different basis for present responsibility than personal culpability. Current members may not have caused the original injustice, but the institution can remain the bearer of capacities and advantages produced by it. It can also remain in a distinctive position to provide records, restore rights, return property, alter rules, or repair dependencies. Historical responsibility can therefore survive personnel turnover through continuity of institutional relation rather than continuity of personal blame.

Young's social connection model is relevant because it distinguishes political responsibility for structural processes from a liability model centered only on fault (Young 2011). The present account similarly resists the inference that absence of personal culpability ends all present responsibility. At the same time, institutional continuity should not be presumed without analysis. Organizations merge, dissolve, transform their mandates, lose assets, acquire new constituencies, or become only nominal successors. The strength of inherited responsibility depends on the continuity of the relevant relational capacities and benefits.

This is another context in which relation lifecycle analysis helps. The formal termination of an institution or policy can leave successor entities that inherit archives, infrastructure, authority, wealth, legal duties, or dependencies. Responsibility can therefore move through relational succession even where the original organizational form disappears.

13.7 Successor Responsibility and Relational Inheritance

Successor responsibility raises a broader question: what does it mean to inherit a relation one did not create? Individuals can inherit property, debt, citizenship, organizational membership, environmental conditions, legal classifications, and institutional privileges. Communities can inherit infrastructures and exclusions. Artificial or administrative systems can inherit training data, classification rules, and dependency structures designed by earlier actors.

The fact of inheritance does not by itself determine responsibility. What matters is how the inherited relation positions the successor. A successor who continues to exercise benefits, authority, or exclusionary powers can have stronger reasons for repair than one who merely shares a historical identity. A successor who gains control over the means of correction can occupy a different normative position from a successor who inherits only burdens. A present actor who actively maintains the inherited relation also becomes part of its continuing history rather than merely a passive recipient of the past.

This avoids two extremes. One extreme dissolves historical responsibility whenever the original wrongdoer is gone. The other treats historical identity as sufficient for indefinite transmission of blame. A relational account instead asks what has actually been transmitted: assets, authority, dependence, constraints, claims, records, benefits, burdens, or capacities for repair.

The approach also clarifies why responsibility can change over time. A successor institution may initially lack knowledge of the historical relation, later gain access to evidence, and eventually acquire practical capacity to respond. Its normative position can therefore change even though the original historical event remains fixed.

13.8 Retrospective Reinterpretation and Repair

Reinterpretation is often practically significant because it can reopen questions of repair. Once a past relation is reconstructed differently, previously dismissed losses can become institutionally recognizable. New evidence can support restitution claims. Revised historical understanding can justify memorialization, apology, legal recognition, institutional reform, or restoration of participation.

But repair should not be treated as a mechanical consequence of retrospective reclassification. The form of repair depends on what has persisted from the historical relation into the present. Some harms are primarily material. Others concern status, recognition, collective capacity, land, institutional authority, cultural continuity, or the loss of future relational possibilities. A payment can therefore be appropriate in one setting and radically incomplete in another.

Transitional justice scholarship is useful because it emphasizes that responses to past wrongs occur within political transformations rather than outside them (Teitel 2000). A relational-becoming perspective adds that repair also changes the present relation and can alter its future generative rules. Restitution can redistribute authority. Truth processes can reorganize archives and public recognition. Institutional reform can change amendment rules, oversight, or exit. Repair is therefore not simply backward-looking compensation; it is itself a relational transformation whose authority and consequences require evaluation.

This point prevents retrospective justice from becoming purely commemorative. Reinterpretation matters partly because the past remains generative in the present. Where historical structures no longer have meaningful present effects, the appropriate response may differ substantially from cases in which authority, wealth, dependency, or exclusion continues to be reproduced.

13.9 Re-cognizability and the Ethics of Historical Preservation

Retrospective justice depends on what earlier institutions preserve. If archives retain only final classifications, future interpreters may be unable to reconstruct how those classifications were produced. If dissenting testimony is discarded, later claims can appear unsupported. If institutional records omit informal power, future reconstruction can reproduce the viewpoint of formal authority.

Re-cognizability therefore has a historical-justice dimension. Records, provenance, alternative accounts, revision histories, and contextual information can preserve the capacity for later reinterpretation. This does not imply maximal preservation. Privacy, safety, forgetting, data minimization, and protection against surveillance can justify deletion or restricted access. The normative question concerns the design of preservation under competing values.

The temporal asymmetry is important. Present institutions can constrain future historical judgment by controlling what survives. Future interpreters cannot recover evidence that was never recorded or was irreversibly destroyed. Archival design can therefore distribute future epistemic power without controlling the substantive conclusions that later actors will reach.

This concern is especially acute where the present institution has an interest in the historical interpretation of its own conduct. Independent custody, plural archives, provenance requirements, and preservation of contesting accounts can sometimes reduce the risk that one actor monopolizes the record through which its own history will later be judged.

13.10 Limits of Retrospective Judgment

Retrospective analysis can become excessive. A sufficiently broad historical inquiry can connect almost every present relation to remote causes. If every causal ancestor becomes part of the justice judgment, responsibility becomes analytically unbounded. Historical depth must therefore remain tied to the purpose of inquiry and to mechanisms that still matter for the present relation or the responsibility question being asked.

A second limit concerns evidential decay. Some past relations cannot be reconstructed with confidence. Missing records, strategic archives, dead witnesses, changed institutions, and conceptual discon-

tinuity can make firm conclusions impossible. The proper response is not always to fill the gap with the morally most attractive interpretation. Uncertainty should remain visible.

A third limit concerns the moralization of anachronism. Later concepts can be illuminating, but their use should not erase historically meaningful differences in knowledge, institutional possibility, and available alternatives. The aim is not to insulate the past from judgment but to distinguish evaluation of the relation from attribution of personal responsibility.

A fourth limit concerns present political use of history. Historical claims can be mobilized strategically to legitimate current power, discredit opponents, or freeze identities around inherited victimhood and guilt. That possibility does not invalidate historical justice, but it reinforces the need to evaluate the present relational consequences of retrospective narratives as well as their evidential basis.

Finally, reinterpretation does not guarantee convergence. Later communities can remain divided over evidence, relevant comparison, responsibility, and repair. A relational framework should not manufacture a single historical verdict where the evidential and normative record remains genuinely contested.

13.11 Historical Responsibility without Temporal Collapse

Retrospective judgment is indispensable to a theory of relational becoming because present relations are partly constituted by histories whose meaning can change as evidence and conceptual resources develop. Later interpretation can reveal harms, dependencies, exclusions, and transformations that earlier accounts failed to recognize. Justice must remain open to such re-cognition.

That openness should not collapse historical time. The present evaluation of a past relation, the epistemic position of historical actors, the attribution of responsibility, the continuity of institutions, and the design of present repair are distinct questions. A later concept can improve reconstruction without proving that every earlier actor could have acted on that concept. An institution can bear present responsibilities without every current member inheriting personal blame. A past wrong can remain normatively significant even when direct liability has weakened or become impossible to assign.

The appropriate retrospective stance is therefore temporally layered. It reconstructs the past with the best presently available evidence while asking what earlier actors could reasonably know and do. It traces which relational effects persist into the present. It identifies who now holds capacities for repair or continues to benefit from inherited structures. It also preserves uncertainty where reconstruction is incomplete.

This account prepares the next section. Once past relations have been reinterpreted and their continuing effects identified, justice must ask what repair can mean without imagining that history can simply be reversed. Section 14 therefore turns to repair, revision, and re-generation as distinct forms of relational transformation.

14 Repair, Revision, and Re-Generation

A theory of relational becoming cannot end with diagnosis. Once a relation has been reconstructed historically, evaluated across its lifecycle, and examined for its effects on future transformability, the practical question becomes what a response should try to change. The language of repair is attractive because it directs attention to continuing consequences rather than to judgment alone. Yet repair is also potentially misleading. It can suggest that justice consists in returning a damaged relation to an earlier intact condition. In many cases no such condition existed, the earlier relation was itself unjust, or the relevant losses cannot be reversed. A generative relational account therefore needs a broader vocabulary that distinguishes restoration, revision, and re-generation.

Restoration seeks to recover a prior capacity, resource, status, institutional position, or relation that was wrongfully lost. Revision changes the terms of an existing relation without necessarily returning to an earlier state. Re-generation concerns the creation of relational possibilities that did not previously exist but become relevant because the history of the relation has foreclosed, destroyed, or rendered inadequate the older alternatives. These are not ranked stages. A case can require one, several, or none of them. The

choice depends on what was damaged, what remains possible, who has authority to act, and what forms of future relational dependence the response would itself create.

The central claim of this section is modest. Repair should be evaluated not only by whether it compensates a past loss or improves a present condition, but also by how it reorganizes the relation's future capacities for participation, revision, exit, recognition, and contestation. This does not make openness or generativity supreme goods. Durable settlement, finality, privacy, closure, and institutional stability can all be justified. The point is that reparative action is itself a transformation of relations and therefore requires the same temporal and generative scrutiny developed throughout the paper.

14.1 Repair beyond Restoration

Restoration is the most intuitive model of repair. Property can be returned. A legal status can be reinstated. Access can be restored. A suspended right can be reactivated. A wrongfully excluded participant can be readmitted. These remedies are important precisely because some injustices consist in identifiable deprivations for which a prior condition provides a meaningful reference point.

But restoration has limits. First, the prior condition may itself have been unjust. Reinstating a worker to a formally subordinate position, returning a community to a dependent administrative arrangement, or restoring an institution whose internal rules generated the original exclusion can reproduce rather than repair the relational problem. Second, historical change can make literal restoration impossible. Land can be transformed, institutions dissolved, knowledge lost, populations dispersed, or technological environments altered. Third, a return to the past can impose new burdens on actors who entered the relation later and did not generate the original wrong.

Historical-injustice debates already show that rectification cannot always be understood as mechanically recreating a counterfactual past (Nozick 1974; Waldron 1992; Butt 2008). A relational account adds that the object to be repaired may include dependency, authority, effective alternatives, recognition, or rules of future transformation. These features are rarely restored simply by reproducing an earlier distribution of goods.

The practical question is therefore what aspect of the relation requires repair. If the central loss concerns material resources, restitution may be central. If it concerns effective participation, institutional inclusion may matter more. If it concerns a durable asymmetry in amendment or veto power, returning resources without changing governance can leave the deeper relational structure intact. If it concerns destroyed social or cultural capacities, restoration may require support for institutions through which those capacities can again become effective rather than an attempt to reproduce a frozen historical form.

This is why repair must be linked to the lifecycle analysis developed in Section 5. Formation injustice, maintenance injustice, modification injustice, exit injustice, and wrongful removal can require different responses. A remedy directed at the wrong lifecycle site can be symbolically impressive while leaving the causal and relational mechanism unchanged.

14.2 Identifying the Reparative Target

Before selecting a remedy, a relational account needs to identify what exactly is being repaired. The target can lie at several levels.

One target is the present relational state. A party may lack access, resources, legal standing, safety, or participation. A second target is a continuing historical burden: debt, dependency, inherited exclusion, reputational harm, institutional distrust, or loss of collective capacity. A third target is the distribution of effective alternatives. A formally restored right can remain ineffective where the actor lacks viable routes to exercise it. A fourth target is the generative rule itself: who can amend the relation, who controls information, who can authorize future changes, and what forms of review or exit remain available. A fifth target is epistemic. The harm may persist partly because records, classifications, or official narratives continue to erase what happened.

These targets can overlap but should not be collapsed. Compensation for a past loss may improve present welfare without changing the authority structure that generated the loss. Institutional reform

can change future rules without acknowledging or repairing an accumulated material burden. Historical recognition can correct an official narrative while leaving effective alternatives unchanged. A reparative programme therefore needs to say which target it addresses and why that target matters to the relevant justice claim.

This discipline also helps avoid an overly expansive conception of repair. Not every undesirable feature of a present relation is attributable to the historical injustice under review. A reparative claim should identify a sufficiently supported connection between the past relational process and the present condition or future constraint that the remedy seeks to address. Otherwise repair becomes a general label for preferred reform.

14.3 Revision of Existing Relations

Where the relation remains valuable or unavoidable but its terms are unjust, revision can be more appropriate than restoration or termination. Revision concerns the alteration of existing relational terms: decision procedures, access rules, benefit sharing, amendment rights, oversight, evidential standards, participation, or the distribution of risk.

Revision is especially important where the relation has developed over time and cannot plausibly be reconstructed as though the unjust episode never occurred. A public institution can revise its eligibility rules. A platform can alter its appeals process. A treaty system can redistribute agenda-setting power. A professional body can change who participates in standard setting. A humanitarian organization can redesign decision procedures after recognizing that its prior intervention created dependency.

The justice question is not merely whether the new rule is preferable. It also concerns how revision authority is exercised. Section 9 emphasized that diagnosing a problematic relation does not itself confer authority to transform it. Repair can therefore become paternalistic when powerful actors redesign a relation on behalf of those they previously excluded without giving them meaningful influence over the revision. A remedy can reproduce the same asymmetry through the process by which the remedy is imposed.

Participation does not resolve every difficulty. Affected participants can disagree, participation can be unequal, and some changes require technical or institutional knowledge. The point is not that every revision must be directly co-designed by everyone affected. It is that the distribution of voice, expertise, veto, review, and appeal in the reparative process is itself part of the justice inquiry.

Revision should also be assessed for durability. A temporary policy change may leave the old generative rule intact, allowing the previous relation to re-emerge when leadership, funding, or political attention changes. Conversely, embedding a reform too deeply can make later correction difficult if the repair itself has unanticipated effects. Reparative revision therefore raises the same problem of rigidity and revisability that appeared in the analysis of generative rules.

14.4 Re-Generation when Return Is Neither Possible nor Desirable

Some histories leave no plausible relation to restore. A community displaced over generations may no longer be able to return to an earlier institutional arrangement. A destroyed ecosystem cannot be recreated exactly. A technical infrastructure can become obsolete. An organization founded on exclusion can be so thoroughly transformed that reinstating its former form would be inappropriate. In such cases repair must be prospective as well as retrospective.

The term *re-generation* is used here cautiously for the creation of new relational possibilities responsive to a history of injustice without pretending that the past can be reversed. Re-generation can include new institutions, alternative governance arrangements, renewed forms of collective capacity, new participation channels, new infrastructures for exit or voice, or new relations of stewardship and custody. The relevant question is whether these new arrangements address the continuing relational effects of the history and do so under defensible authority.

Re-generation should not be confused with innovation for its own sake. Nor does it imply that justice requires maximizing the number of possible relations. New relations can deepen dependency, erase

historical claims, or impose unwanted identities. A state can respond to dispossession by creating a new administrative programme that increases surveillance. A corporation can answer criticism by building a new consultation mechanism while retaining unilateral control over whether consultation matters. A reparative institution can become a permanent gatekeeper over the very group it was designed to assist.

For this reason, re-generation should be assessed against the history it seeks to address, the effective alternatives it creates, the dependencies it introduces, and the future rules it establishes. Its value lies not in novelty but in whether it creates a more defensible relational configuration where restoration alone cannot do so.

14.5 Repair of Generative Rules

One of the paper's central claims is that actions can alter not only relational states but the rules that shape later transformations. Repair must therefore sometimes target the generative rule rather than only the current condition.

Examples include amendment procedures, veto structures, review mechanisms, ownership rules, data access, evidential standards, interface control, succession rules, emergency powers, and conditions of exit. If an injustice was generated by a structure in which one actor could unilaterally redefine the relation, then compensation without changing that authority can leave the mechanism of recurrence intact. If a historical exclusion persisted because affected actors had no route to challenge classification, then repair can require contestability rather than only retrospective recognition.

Repair of generative rules is particularly important after emergency or humanitarian intervention. An intervention may be justified by urgent need yet leave behind new powers of surveillance, custody, coordination, or dependency. The reparative task can therefore include dismantling temporary authority, restoring independent capacity, transferring infrastructure, creating review, or making exit effective. What requires repair is not simply the immediate harm but the altered distribution of future transformation capacity.

This approach also clarifies why institutional reform can be reparative even when it does not compensate every past loss. Changing the rule that reproduces exclusion can prevent the historical relation from remaining generative. At the same time, rule reform alone can be insufficient where substantial accumulated losses remain. Reparative justice can require both backward-looking and forward-looking elements without reducing one to the other.

14.6 Reopening Effective Alternatives

Section 10 treated effective alternatives and exit as distinct objects of justice. Repair can therefore involve reopening options that were formally present but practically inaccessible, or recreating alternatives that a historical process destroyed.

The capability approach is relevant because restoration of substantive opportunity can matter more than nominal permission (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2006). In relational terms, reopening alternatives may require resources, infrastructure, legal standing, information, collective coordination, or protection against retaliation. A right to leave a relation has limited reparative significance where departure remains materially impossible. A right to participate has limited significance where the evidential or linguistic infrastructure excludes the participant's claims.

Reopening alternatives does not mean making every path available. Some options can justifiably remain prohibited or institutionally difficult. Nor does it mean recreating an earlier opportunity set exactly. The practical aim is to identify which restricted alternatives were normatively significant to the injustice and what present conditions would make comparable forms of agency effective now.

Repair can also concern collective alternatives. Communities can lose not only individual options but the capacity to sustain institutions, practices, languages, archives, or forms of self-organization. Re-generation in such cases can involve rebuilding collective capacities rather than only expanding individual choice. This is another reason a purely compensatory model can be too narrow.

14.7 Recognition, Record, and Epistemic Repair

Some injustices persist partly through official interpretation. A harm can remain institutionally invisible, a group can remain misclassified, or an archive can preserve only the perspective of the dominant actor. Repair can therefore have an epistemic dimension.

Epistemic repair can include acknowledgment, correction of records, preservation of previously excluded testimony, revision of institutional categories, access to archives, provenance disclosure, or new procedures for contesting official interpretation. These responses can matter even where direct material compensation is impossible. They can change status, public memory, evidential possibility, and the capacity of later actors to reconstruct the relation.

Yet epistemic repair should not be romanticized. Official recognition can freeze a complex history into a new authoritative narrative. Truth processes can expose participants to risk. Archival expansion can conflict with privacy and legitimate forgetting. Recognition can also become a substitute for material change. A relational account should therefore ask how epistemic repair interacts with resources, authority, effective alternatives, and future re-cognizability.

The distinction between practical closure and epistemic openness is useful here. A reparative settlement may need to resolve claims for institutional purposes while still preserving records and procedural routes through which later evidence or interpretations can be considered. Finality in one domain need not require permanent closure in every epistemic domain.

14.8 Authority, Participation, and Repair Capture

Repair frequently creates new concentrations of authority. Someone must determine eligibility, verify evidence, allocate resources, recognize successors, manage archives, redesign institutions, or decide when repair is complete. These tasks can generate what may be called *repair capture*: a condition in which the institution or actor controlling the remedy gains durable power over those whose relation it is supposed to repair.

Repair capture can occur even when the original programme is well intentioned. An aid mechanism can make recipients dependent on continued certification. A restitution bureaucracy can define identity more rigidly than the community itself. A transitional institution can monopolize historical interpretation. A technical remediation process can centralize infrastructure in the hands of the actor responsible for the original failure.

The solution is not simply decentralization. Some reparative tasks require coordination, expertise, record keeping, and stable authority. The relevant questions concern mandate, scope, duration, review, conflict of interest, participation, transparency, and exit. Repair institutions should be judged as new relational structures, not treated as normatively transparent instruments.

This is also where affected participants' authority matters most clearly. Those who bear the continuing effects of an injustice generally have reasons to influence the form of repair, but their interests need not be homogeneous. Internal inequalities, generational differences, strategic disagreement, and competing claims can complicate representation. Reparative legitimacy therefore requires attention to how representation is constituted rather than assuming a single authentic voice.

14.9 Sequencing, Transition, and Reparative Timing

Repair takes place in time. The order of measures can alter their effectiveness and legitimacy. Recognition without material security can expose claimants before they have protection. Redistribution without institutional reform can be reversed. Institutional reform without historical acknowledgment can leave disputes over legitimacy unresolved. Immediate restitution can sometimes generate conflict where ownership, succession, or dependency has changed over long periods.

Transitional justice scholarship is useful precisely because it treats justice responses as part of political transition rather than as isolated corrections (Teitel 2000). A relational account extends this temporal sensitivity to the sequencing of repair. Some changes are enabling conditions for others. Some remedies

create new dependencies that must later be unwound. Some temporary arrangements are justified only if there is a credible path toward transfer, review, or termination.

Timing also matters for evidential reasons. Delayed repair can allow records to disappear and dependencies to deepen. Premature closure can settle claims before relevant evidence or representation becomes available. A reparative process should therefore make explicit which uncertainties justify delay and which harms make delay itself costly.

This does not yield a universal sequence. It yields a question for institutional design: what ordering of measures best addresses the specific relational mechanism while preserving sufficient capacity to revise the process if its assumptions prove mistaken?

14.10 Monitoring, Revision, and the Possibility that Repair Fails

A theory of repair should assume neither success nor benevolence. Remedies can misfire. Compensation can intensify conflict. New institutions can reproduce old exclusions. Reopened options can be unusable. Historical recognition can harden identities. Reforms can shift rather than reduce dependence.

Monitoring is therefore part of reparative design where significant uncertainty remains. The relevant indicators should track not only delivery of the remedy but the relational condition the remedy was intended to change. If the aim was effective exit, monitoring should examine whether exit has become practically feasible. If the aim was redistribution of amendment power, it should examine who can actually initiate and sustain revision. If the aim was epistemic repair, it should examine whether alternative accounts can enter consequential institutional processes.

Revision mechanisms are equally important. A reparative programme that cannot revise its eligibility rules, evidential standards, governance, or duration can become locked into an early interpretation of the injustice. At the same time, constant revisability can undermine reliance and finality. The appropriate design depends on the stakes, uncertainty, and risk of capture.

Failure should also be classifiable. A remedy can fail because it targeted the wrong lifecycle site, because the causal diagnosis was wrong, because implementation diverged from design, because authority was illegitimate, because the measure generated adverse long-horizon effects, or because the surrounding generative rules re-created the original pattern. Distinguishing these failure modes can improve later repair rather than treating every disappointing outcome as evidence that the underlying normative claim was mistaken.

14.11 Limits of Reparative Ambition

Repair has normative and practical limits. Some harms cannot be undone. Some historical relations cannot be reconstructed with enough confidence to support precise remedies. Some forms of restoration would impose severe burdens on present actors or recreate relations that no longer have a defensible place. Some institutions lack the capacity to deliver complex reparative programmes without producing new domination or corruption.

There is also a danger of converting every justice question into a permanent reparative project. Endless institutional management can keep persons and communities tied to identities defined by past injury. Reparative agencies can acquire interests in the continuation of their mandate. Political actors can use historical claims strategically. A commitment to re-cognizability should therefore not become a commitment to perpetual reopenability of every settlement.

Finality can be valuable. So can forgetting, privacy, stable expectation, and the ability to build relations not wholly organized around past injustice. The challenge is to distinguish justified closure from closure that merely entrenches unresolved power. No general formula settles that distinction.

The concept of re-generation has similar limits. It should not become a license for planners to re-design social relations in the name of justice. New relational possibilities can be valuable only where they respond to supported claims, respect defensible authority, and remain attentive to the dependencies and powers they create. The framework therefore rejects both restoration fetishism and transformational enthusiasm.

14.12 Repair as a Bridge between Past and Future Justice

Repair occupies a distinctive position in the justice of relational becoming. It is backward-looking because it responds to histories of deprivation, domination, exclusion, or wrongful transformation. It is present-oriented because it must address the relations, capacities, authorities, and burdens that actually exist now. It is prospective because every reparative intervention changes what future relations become reachable and who can shape them.

A relational account therefore treats repair as more than compensation and less than a mandate for unrestricted transformation. Restoration can recover what remains meaningfully recoverable. Revision can change unjust terms in relations that continue. Re-generation can create defensible alternatives where the earlier relational field has been irreversibly altered. Rule repair can change the mechanisms through which injustice is reproduced. Epistemic repair can preserve the capacity to recognize and contest the history. None of these responses is automatically appropriate merely because a past wrong has been identified.

The practical discipline is to connect the remedy to the relational mechanism. What was lost? What continues to generate the loss? Which actors now hold the relevant capacities or authority? Which alternatives need to become effective? Which future powers would the remedy itself create? What forms of review, exit, or closure are needed? These questions prevent repair from being reduced either to symbolic recognition or to open-ended institutional redesign.

This analysis prepares the applications in the next section. Law, governance, humanitarian action, and artificial systems provide different settings in which relational histories, lifecycle sites, generative rules, authority, exit, quotienting, prospective regions, retrospective reinterpretation, and repair can interact. Section 15 uses those domains to test how far the framework travels and where domain-specific concepts remain indispensable.

15 Applications to Law, Governance, Humanitarian Action, and Artificial Systems

The framework developed in this paper is deliberately general. That generality is useful only if it changes what one looks for in concrete cases. The purpose of this section is therefore not to introduce another theoretical layer, but to show how the preceding distinctions reorganize practical analysis across several domains. Law, public governance, humanitarian action, and artificial systems differ substantially in institutional form and normative background. They should not be forced into a single substantive theory. What they share, however, is that they all contain relations that are formed, maintained, modified, exited, and sometimes terminated; interventions that generate effects beyond their declared aims; and rules that shape who will be able to revise the relation later.

The applications below are thus diagnostic rather than deductive. They ask where a justice analysis should look once relational state, history, effective alternatives, generative rules, authority, temporal consequences, and repair are treated as separate but connected objects. The framework does not determine a final verdict in any of the domains. It identifies additional sites at which a verdict may need justification.

15.1 Law: From Adjudicated State to Relational Trajectory

Legal institutions often work by stabilizing a dispute into a set of legally cognizable facts, claims, parties, and remedies. This stabilization is necessary. Courts and administrative bodies cannot adjudicate an unlimited relational history. Yet the legal form can compress a process into a present legal state in ways that obscure how the relevant relation was generated.

Consider a contractual dispute involving formally voluntary agreement. A state-centered analysis can focus on whether the parties presently occupy legally recognized positions and whether the contract was validly formed. A relational-genealogical analysis adds questions about how the parties came to possess their effective alternatives. One party may have entered the contract after a history of dependency,

exclusion from other markets, informational asymmetry, or control over an essential resource. None of these facts automatically invalidates the contract. Their significance depends on the legal doctrine and normative purpose at issue. But they can be relevant to whether formal consent adequately captures the relation's formation conditions.

The same point applies to remedies. A judgment can redistribute money or formally terminate a legal relation while leaving the effective relational structure largely intact. A worker may receive damages while remaining dependent on the same concentrated labor market. A tenant may win an individual claim while the institutional conditions that generated the dispute persist. A data subject may receive deletion or compensation while the platform retains the authority to redesign future terms unilaterally. The framework therefore asks whether the remedy addresses the present legal state, the continuing relational mechanism, or both.

This does not imply that courts should transform themselves into institutions for general structural reform. Their authority can be deliberately limited. Indeed, Section 9 emphasized that diagnosing a broader relational problem does not establish judicial authority to redesign the entire field. The application to law is therefore two-sided. Relational becoming can reveal what ordinary adjudication omits, while authority analysis explains why some of those omissions may properly be addressed by legislatures, regulators, collective bargaining institutions, or other bodies rather than by the court deciding the immediate case.

Legal precedent also illustrates the justice of quotienting. Courts compare cases by treating some differences as legally relevant and others as irrelevant. The question is not whether abstraction should occur; legal reasoning would be impossible without it. The question is whether the selected comparison suppresses a historical, relational, or capability-relevant difference that matters to the doctrine being applied. A precedent can be formally similar while differing in effective alternatives, duration of dependency, distribution of amendment power, or the availability of exit. The framework therefore encourages a more explicit account of what a legal analogy preserves and what it leaves out.

Finally, law is one of the clearest sites at which generative rules are institutionalized. Procedural rules, amendment mechanisms, appellate structures, corporate governance rules, labor law, property rules, and constitutional design all allocate capacities to initiate, block, review, or reverse future changes. A legal reform can therefore be evaluated not only by its immediate distributive effect but by how it redistributes future transformation capacity. This is especially important where an emergency measure, temporary exception, or administrative delegation becomes durable after the problem that justified it has passed.

15.2 Public Governance: Policy as Relational Reconfiguration

Public policy is often evaluated through outputs, welfare effects, compliance, or institutional performance. A relational-becoming perspective asks an additional question: what kind of relation does the policy create among citizens, agencies, service providers, data infrastructures, and future decision makers?

A welfare programme, for example, can expand substantive opportunity while also reorganizing dependence on administrative certification. A digital identity system can improve access while making participation in other domains increasingly conditional on one infrastructural relation. A public-private partnership can mobilize resources while giving a contractor durable agenda-setting or informational power. None of these effects is necessarily unjust. The point is that governance produces relational architectures as well as immediate outputs.

This is where the distinction between action and generated relational effect becomes practically useful. A policy can succeed according to its declared operational objective and still produce an unintended concentration of future amendment power. Conversely, a policy can generate beneficial relational consequences that were not part of its original justification. Evaluation should therefore distinguish implementation fidelity from the longer-run relation that the policy helps stabilize.

The analysis of generative rules is particularly relevant in regulatory design. Regulators do not merely constrain conduct. They often determine who participates in standard setting, what evidence is admissible, who can petition for revision, how often rules are reviewed, and which actors can exit or challenge a

regime. These institutional features shape the future trajectory of regulated relations. A rule that is substantively defensible at adoption can become problematic if its revision structure systematically excludes those who bear its changing effects.

Prospective justice also matters because governance decisions frequently close or open future relational regions. Infrastructure investment, land-use regulation, energy systems, educational structures, and digital standards can create durable path dependence. A government cannot know all future consequences, and the framework does not demand impossible prediction. It asks instead whether credible mechanisms indicate that a decision will make some important future alternatives substantially harder to recover and whether those losses have been adequately considered.

The same caution applies to participation. More participation is not automatically better. Consultation can become symbolic, slow urgent action, or privilege actors with greater time and organizational capacity. What matters is whether participation affects the forms of authority and dependency relevant to the decision. A relational account therefore evaluates participation in connection with effective influence, reviewability, and the distribution of transformation capacity rather than treating participation as an independent procedural virtue.

15.3 Humanitarian Action: Protection, Dependence, and Exit

Humanitarian action offers a particularly demanding application because intervention frequently occurs under uncertainty, urgency, asymmetric power, and potentially irreversible harm. The immediate objective may be clear: preserve life, reduce suffering, create safety, or maintain access to essential goods. Yet humanitarian action can also generate enduring relational structures between affected populations, agencies, host governments, donors, contractors, and data systems.

A relational-becoming analysis does not weaken the importance of immediate protection. It distinguishes the temporal horizons at which different questions arise. An emergency action can be justified by urgent present conditions even when its long-term relational effects remain uncertain. The further question is what capacities the intervention creates and how those capacities will later be reviewed, transferred, limited, or ended.

Dependency is one obvious issue. Dependence on humanitarian provision is not inherently unjust. Under conditions of disaster, displacement, conflict, or institutional collapse, dependence may be unavoidable and protective. The relevant question is whether the intervention unnecessarily converts temporary dependence into a durable structure in which affected participants lack effective alternatives, voice, or routes of transition. This is why exit and transfer conditions matter even when immediate withdrawal would be irresponsible.

Authority is equally important. A humanitarian organization can acquire practical power because it controls food, shelter, transport, identification, registration, medical access, or information. That acquired power can create responsibilities, but it does not grant unlimited authority over the social or political organization of the population receiving assistance. A mandate to provide protection should therefore be distinguished from a mandate to redesign institutions, adjudicate internal disputes, or impose long-term governance arrangements.

Information systems add another layer. Registration and needs assessment can be indispensable, yet they can also create durable classifications and dependencies on external records. A temporary humanitarian database may later become an identity infrastructure. A vulnerability category can determine access long after the circumstances that justified it have changed. The framework therefore asks whether temporary epistemic and administrative structures are becoming generative rules for future participation.

Repair is also relevant after intervention. When an intervention has produced dependency, exclusion, data exposure, or governance distortion, repair may require more than compensation. Revision can involve changing decision procedures, transferring control, creating independent review, rebuilding local capacity, or reopening alternatives that the intervention unintentionally displaced. Re-generation may be necessary where pre-intervention institutions no longer exist or cannot defensibly be restored.

The framework remains deliberately cautious here. It does not infer a general duty to intervene from the existence of suffering, nor does it equate non-intervention with neutrality. Those normative

bridges require separate justification. Once intervention occurs, however, relational becoming becomes relevant because the intervening actor has become part of the historical process that shapes later options, dependencies, and authority.

15.4 Artificial Systems: Architecture as a Generative Rule

Artificial systems provide an especially clear illustration of the difference between present behavior and generative structure. A deployed system can be evaluated for accuracy, safety, fairness, robustness, or compliance at a given time. A relational analysis adds questions about how the architecture redistributes future capacities to update, override, inspect, contest, terminate, or migrate away from the system.

This is particularly important for systems embedded in organizational decision making. A model can initially serve as an advisory tool and later become an infrastructural dependency. Human decision makers can reorganize their practices around it. Data collection can change because the model requires particular inputs. Appeals can become difficult because the institution no longer maintains an alternative decision pathway. Over time, what began as a local technical intervention can alter the generative rule of the institutional relation.

The justice question is therefore not limited to whether the model's current outputs are acceptable. It also concerns who controls retraining, parameter changes, deployment scope, interface design, access to logs, appeals, fallback procedures, and eventual retirement. These features determine who can transform the system later and what effective alternatives remain available to those subject to it.

Vendor dependence provides a straightforward example. An institution can purchase a system that performs well and still become dependent on proprietary infrastructure, documentation, or update cycles. The immediate state may be satisfactory while future transformation capacity becomes concentrated outside the institution. This does not establish injustice. The concentration may be efficient or necessary. But it is a relevant relational effect because it changes who can revise the arrangement in response to future evidence, norms, or failures.

Artificial agents also sharpen the distinction between action and generated effect. A system can execute an action according to its programming while producing relational changes that no designer specifically intended: new dependencies between users, altered bargaining positions, reduced access to human review, or changed expectations about what counts as acceptable evidence. Responsibility for those effects cannot be assigned simply by locating the immediate computational action. It may be distributed across design, deployment, institutional adoption, maintenance, and governance.

The framework does not assume that artificial systems possess moral status, phenomenal experience, or responsibility in a strong sense. Those questions remain open and context dependent. The present application is narrower. Even where an artificial system is treated purely as an instrument, the relations generated around that instrument can still become objects of justice. If future artificial systems become participants in more complex normative relations, the same analytical distinctions can be extended without first assuming a settled ontology of artificial subjectivity.

15.5 Artificial–Artificial and Human–Artificial Ecologies

More complex artificial ecologies further expose the importance of relational history and generative rules. Multiple systems can allocate resources, negotiate access, exchange data, modify one another's environments, or become dependent on shared infrastructure. Human institutions may observe only the outputs of these interactions while controlling some of the surrounding conditions.

A state-based analysis can ask whether the systems are functioning as intended. A generative relational analysis asks how the ecology was constituted, who controls the shared infrastructure, what forms of exit or substitution remain available, and whether one system's adaptation reduces the future options of another. If the systems lack moral status, these questions may still matter because the ecology affects human institutions, public resources, safety, competition, or informational power. If some systems later acquire a contested form of ethical standing, the same relational history becomes relevant to how their present positions were produced.

Human control over artificial ecologies can also be distributed. Designers, model providers, cloud operators, data owners, regulators, and deployers may each control a different part of the generative rule. This makes simplistic responsibility attribution difficult. A harmful relation between two artificial systems may be generated by infrastructure neither system controls. Conversely, human actors may lack direct control over the immediate interaction while retaining strong authority over update, access, or termination conditions.

The point is not to anthropomorphize machine relations. It is to preserve analytical distinctions that become useful whenever future options, dependencies, and transformation capacities are distributed across multiple actors or systems.

15.6 Cross-Domain Comparison and the Risk of False Portability

The same vocabulary can illuminate law, governance, humanitarian action, and artificial systems, but cross-domain use creates a danger of false portability. A concept that identifies an important mechanism in one domain can obscure different normative structures in another. Effective exit from a digital platform is not equivalent to exit from citizenship. Revision of software governance is not equivalent to constitutional amendment. Humanitarian dependency is not interchangeable with market dependence. Artificial-system adaptation is not automatically comparable to human agency.

This is where the justice of quotienting developed in Section 11 becomes important. Cross-domain comparison requires an explicit account of what structural feature is being treated as comparable. A comparison may be useful because two cases share concentrated amendment power, limited effective exit, or durable transformation of future options. It becomes misleading when those structural similarities are used to erase differences in coercion, embodiment, legal status, vulnerability, historical obligation, or political membership.

The framework should therefore travel by mechanism rather than by metaphor. A concept is portable when the relevant relational mechanism is sufficiently similar for the analytical purpose at hand. It is not portable merely because two situations can be described with the same vocabulary.

15.7 An Application Protocol

The applications above can be summarized as a practical diagnostic protocol. The protocol is not a decision rule and does not rank competing normative theories. It identifies questions that can be asked before a relation is reduced to a present-state verdict.

First, identify the relation and the institutional purpose of the inquiry. Second, reconstruct the relevant formation history without assuming that every historical fact matters. Third, identify which parts of the relation are being maintained, modified, exited, or removed. Fourth, separate declared intention, implemented action, and generated relational effect. Fifth, ask whether the intervention changes the rules governing future transformation. Sixth, identify who has authority to make those changes and whether that authority is temporary, reviewable, or expandable. Seventh, examine effective alternatives rather than formal options alone. Eighth, make the comparison rule explicit: which differences are being suppressed and for what normative purpose? Ninth, consider credible long-horizon consequences and reachable future regions without treating speculative possibilities as established harms. Tenth, distinguish historical reinterpretation from retrospective responsibility. Finally, where repair is contemplated, specify whether the target is restoration, revision, re-generation, or some combination of them.

The value of this protocol lies in decomposition. It prevents an apparently simple justice question from silently combining several different judgments. A policy can be beneficial in its immediate effect yet problematic in the authority it creates. A relation can have an unjust history yet contain valuable present features. A remedy can correct a material loss while reproducing an asymmetric generative rule. A historically constrained actor can participate in a harmful relation without bearing the same responsibility as the actor who generated the constraint. These are not contradictions once the objects of evaluation are separated.

15.8 Limits of the Applications

These applications remain illustrative. They do not show that every legal, administrative, humanitarian, or artificial-system dispute requires the full framework. Many cases can be resolved adequately through established doctrinal, procedural, distributive, capability, or responsibility analyses. The relational-becoming framework adds value only where history, lifecycle position, effective alternatives, generated effects, transformation authority, or changes in generative rules materially alter what would otherwise be seen.

Nor do the applications establish that the same normative standards govern all domains. Law is constrained by doctrine and institutional competence. Public governance raises questions of democratic legitimacy and public authority. Humanitarian action is structured by urgency, protection, neutrality, consent, and international norms. Artificial systems raise distinct questions of design, infrastructure, accountability, and uncertain subjectivity. The framework supplies a common analytical scaffold, not a common substantive morality.

The applications nevertheless support the paper's broader claim: justice can be misdescribed when a relation is treated only as a present condition. Across very different domains, important normative questions arise from how relations were generated, how they continue to reproduce themselves, how interventions redistribute future transformation capacity, and whether affected participants retain meaningful ways to revise, contest, or leave the relation. These questions do not replace established theories of justice. They identify a temporal and generative dimension that those theories can then evaluate according to their own substantive commitments.

16 Discussion and Open Problems

The preceding sections have developed a temporal and generative account of what may need to be included when justice is applied to relations. The purpose of this discussion is not to add another layer to that framework. It is to identify what the argument has established, what remains only a proposal, where the framework risks analytical overreach, and which problems must be resolved before the account can support stronger normative conclusions. This distinction is particularly important because an expanded object of justice can easily be mistaken for an expanded theory of justice. The paper has argued that histories, lifecycle positions, generated effects, effective alternatives, transformation authority, and generative rules can all become normatively relevant. It has not shown that these objects have the same weight in every case, that one substantive principle can evaluate them all, or that Generative Relational analysis supplies a uniquely correct verdict.

16.1 What the Framework Has Established

The first result is methodological. A present relational state can be insufficient for justice analysis when the history that produced it continues to shape powers, burdens, effective alternatives, or claims. This does not mean that every historical detail must be retained. It means that genealogy can be part of the relevant object when prior transformations remain constitutive of the present relation. Section 4 therefore treated historical depth as purpose-indexed rather than indefinitely expandable.

The second result is analytical. Intention, implemented action, and generated relational effect should not be collapsed. An actor can pursue a protective purpose, implement a formally authorized intervention, and nevertheless generate dependence, concentration of revision power, or loss of effective exit. Conversely, a harmful relational effect does not by itself settle culpability. Responsibility depends on additional considerations such as role, foreseeability, control, historical position, and available alternatives. This separation helps avoid both moralization of intention and retrospective over-attribution of fault.

The third result concerns second-order transformation. The formal pair (R_t, F_t) makes visible a distinction that ordinary state descriptions often obscure. An action can alter the current relation while also altering the conditions under which later relations can be revised. The significance of F_t is not that every social relation can literally be reduced to a transition function. It is that institutions distribute capacities

to initiate, veto, amend, contest, suspend, or exit future changes. Where an intervention redistributes those capacities, the transformation of the rule structure becomes a candidate object of justice alongside the immediate outcome.

The fourth result concerns authority. A justified negative judgment of a relation does not automatically determine who is entitled to transform it. Expertise, affectedness, causal implication, institutional role, consent, public mandate, and emergency capacity can each matter, but they are not interchangeable. This separation is especially important where an actor can correctly diagnose a problem while lacking legitimate authority to reorganize the relation, or where an actor possesses formal authority while lacking adequate epistemic access to what the transformation will generate.

The fifth result is temporal. Justice can require several standpoints without reducing them to a single chronology. Genealogical judgment asks how a relation came to exist. Present judgment asks what structure currently obtains. Prospective judgment asks what future regions and transformation capacities are being made reachable or unreachable. Realized-consequence analysis asks what an intervention actually generated. Retrospective reinterpretation asks how later evidence or concepts alter reconstruction of the past. These standpoints can support different judgments without contradiction because they answer different questions.

Taken together, these results support a limited thesis: relational justice may require evaluation of becoming as well as being. The paper does not thereby claim that process always dominates outcome, that history always defeats present settlement, or that revisability is always better than stability.

16.2 What Is Not Claimed as New

The framework should be read against mature traditions rather than as a replacement for them. Historical provenance is already central to entitlement and rectification debates. Structural injustice literature already explains how harmful conditions can persist without a single wrongful act or intention. Relational equality and recognition theory already direct attention to social relations rather than distributions alone. Capability approaches already distinguish effective opportunities from formal permissions. Republican theory already treats domination as a matter of power structures rather than only realized interference. Path-dependence scholarship already shows why sequence, institutional reproduction, and increasing returns can make history causally significant. Transitional justice already studies how societies respond to inherited wrongs while remaking institutions. These are antecedents, not discoveries of this paper (Young 2011; Sen 1999; Pettit 1997; Pierson 2000; Teitel 2000).

The paper's narrower contribution lies in assembling several of these concerns around the lifecycle and transformability of relations, and in making a few distinctions unusually explicit: the separation of intention from generated relational effect; the treatment of changes in generative rules as candidate objects of justice; the separation of relational judgment from authority to transform; and the use of future reachable relational regions as a prospective analytical object without turning optionality into a supreme norm. Whether these distinctions ultimately deserve to be treated as a distinctive theory, rather than as a useful scaffold joining established theories, should remain open.

16.3 The Problem of Normative Underdetermination

The largest unresolved problem is normative. Expanding the object of justice does not determine how the object should be judged. A history can be coercive while a present relation is valued by its participants. A relation can preserve strong exit options while producing severe inequality within the relation. A durable institution can constrain future revision while providing stability that participants reasonably value. A reparative intervention can reopen alternatives while imposing new administrative burdens. The framework can make these tensions visible, but visibility does not resolve them.

This problem is especially acute because the paper deliberately refuses to install generativity, revisability, openness, or re-cognizability as universal overriding principles. If they were treated as supreme values, many difficult questions would become artificially easy: the more open and revisable relation

would simply be judged better. That move would conflict with the paper's own examples. Durable commitments, constitutional settlements, long-term care relations, secure property arrangements, privacy protections, and reliable institutional expectations can all depend on limiting some forms of unilateral revision. The normative value of transformability is therefore conditional.

A fuller account must specify how temporally distinct claims interact. It may draw on relational equality, capability, non-domination, rights, contractualism, democratic legitimacy, care, or other substantive theories. The present framework is designed to expose the temporal-generative objects those theories may need to evaluate, not to decide among them.

16.4 How Much History Is Enough?

A second open problem concerns historical depth. Once genealogy is admitted into the object of justice, analysis can expand indefinitely. Every relation has antecedents, and every antecedent has its own conditions of production. If all causally relevant history must be reconstructed, practical judgment becomes impossible.

The paper has proposed a constitutive-relevance discipline: historical material is especially important when it continues to structure present power, dependency, effective alternatives, claims, or transformation rules. This helps, but it is not a complete stopping rule. Constitutive relevance itself can be contested. One actor may regard an old event as exhausted; another may experience its institutional consequences as ongoing. Later evidence may reveal pathways that were previously invisible.

Future work should therefore distinguish at least three tasks. Historical explanation asks what generated the present relation. Historical responsibility asks what could fairly be attributed to actors situated in that history. Present repair asks which inherited effects remain normatively relevant now. These tasks can require different temporal windows. A single universal horizon is unlikely to be appropriate.

16.5 Identifying Generative Rules in Practice

The concept of a generative rule is useful precisely because many interventions change more than the current state. Yet F_t is also one of the least operationalized elements of the framework. In formal models, a transition rule can be specified explicitly. In institutions and social relations, the effective rule is distributed across law, norms, technical systems, expectations, resource dependencies, informal practices, and differential capacities to revise those arrangements.

An empirical analysis therefore cannot simply read F_t from a statute or organizational chart. Formal amendment procedures may coexist with inaccessible effective procedures. A platform may permit exit while network dependence makes exit practically unavailable. An emergency institution may be legally temporary while budgets, expertise, and administrative routines make its continuation highly likely. The effective generative rule must be reconstructed from how change actually occurs.

This creates an evidential problem. Researchers need methods for identifying who can initiate change, whose approval is required, which vetoes are effective, how costly revision is, what informal workarounds exist, how conflicts are resolved, and whether nominal exit or review mechanisms function in practice. Without such operationalization, F_t risks becoming a powerful metaphor rather than an analytically discriminating object.

16.6 Causal Attribution and Remote Relational Effects

The distinction between action and generated effect raises a further difficulty: how far along a causal history should responsibility extend? Modern institutions routinely generate consequences through many interacting actors, adaptive responses, and background conditions. Once long-horizon relational effects are considered, direct attribution becomes increasingly difficult.

The paper has resisted two extremes. It does not reduce responsibility to the immediate actor, because constraint-generating institutions and upstream designers can matter. It also does not attribute responsibility to every actor causally connected to a harmful outcome. Future work must develop more precise

criteria involving contribution, role, knowledge, control, foreseeability, benefit, capacity to remedy, and perhaps participation in sustaining the relevant structure.

This issue becomes especially difficult when the effect concerns a change in generative rules rather than a visible harm. An institution can normalize a new review practice or create dependence gradually, with no single actor intending the resulting concentration of transformation power. A justice analysis needs to distinguish responsibility for originating the change, responsibility for maintaining it after its effects become visible, and responsibility for repair once adequate knowledge exists.

16.7 Authority, Expertise, and Epistemic Dependence

The separation of judgment from authority creates an unresolved institutional design problem. Transformative authority often requires expertise, but expertise itself can be concentrated in actors who benefit from the existing relation. A humanitarian organization may understand a crisis better than affected outsiders while simultaneously controlling resources on which local actors depend. A technology provider may possess unique knowledge required to modify a system while also holding commercial interests in maintaining control. A public authority may possess lawful jurisdiction while relying on interpretive infrastructures that exclude affected participants.

The answer cannot be simply to replace expert authority with participant preference. Participants can be internally heterogeneous, historically constrained, or unequally positioned. Nor can formal consent settle the problem where effective alternatives are weak. Future work should examine institutional combinations of expertise, affected-party voice, contestability, transparency, review, and limited mandate. The problem is not to eliminate asymmetry, which may be impossible, but to determine when asymmetry becomes unjustified authority over relational transformation.

16.8 Exit Is Important but Incomplete

The analysis of effective alternatives gives exit a significant role, but exit should not become a universal proxy for justice. Some relations cannot be exited without abandoning basic membership, territory, family, citizenship, bodily dependence, or essential public goods. Other relations are valuable precisely because they create durable obligations that are not continuously renegotiated. Even where exit is possible, a system can remain unjust internally.

The stronger contribution of the exit analysis is therefore diagnostic. It distinguishes formal permission from effective feasibility and asks who bears the costs of leaving. It also reveals when a supposedly voluntary relation depends on alternatives that were historically destroyed. Future research should integrate exit with voice, internal contestation, collective action, and duties of inclusion rather than treating mobility alone as sufficient protection.

16.9 Comparison, Quotienting, and the Risk of Analytical Convenience

Section 11 argued that comparison requires selective abstraction. The open problem is how to distinguish a defensible quotient from one chosen mainly for analytical convenience. Institutional actors often need categories that can be applied consistently across many cases. Excessive particularization can undermine equal treatment, predictability, and administrative feasibility. Yet coarse comparison can erase formation history, dependence, embodiment, or effective alternatives that are normatively relevant.

The question “equivalent modulo what?” therefore needs an institutional answer as well as a philosophical one. Who selects the relevant dimensions? Can affected parties contest them? Are suppressed differences recoverable on appeal? Does the quotient operate differently across groups? Can the institution maintain several purpose-specific comparisons rather than a single universal classification? These questions connect the justice of quotienting to procedural design and epistemic infrastructure.

16.10 Prospective Justice under Deep Uncertainty

Future relational regions are useful because they focus attention on reachability, branching, and closure rather than a single predicted outcome. But they also create a danger of speculative moralization. Almost any action can be associated with remote scenarios in which future options are narrowed or expanded. If merely imaginable futures carry substantial weight, prospective justice can become unbounded.

The paper has therefore emphasized credible mechanisms, temporal discounting of epistemic confidence rather than moral worth, and robust judgment under uncertainty. These ideas require further development. Future work should distinguish measurable transformation capacity from speculative narrative, identify when option foreclosure is irreversible enough to merit special concern, and clarify how present participants should weigh the claims of future participants whose preferences and identities are unknown.

This is also where climate governance, constitutional design, long-lived infrastructure, ecological intervention, and advanced artificial systems may provide useful empirical cases. Each involves decisions that shape future relational regions without permitting precise prediction of future states.

16.11 Retrospective Reinterpretation without Temporal Collapse

Historical reinterpretation poses the mirror-image problem. Later concepts and evidence can reveal harms that earlier participants could not adequately name. Yet it would be unfair to attribute every later insight to earlier actors as if it had already been available to them. The paper has therefore separated present evaluation of the past from responsibility attribution to historical agents.

A remaining difficulty is institutional responsibility across time. Organizations can persist while personnel change. Benefits, assets, records, reputational standing, and legal identity may continue even when individual decision makers are gone. Successor institutions can therefore inherit reasons for acknowledgment, repair, or structural change without inheriting personal culpability in the same form. Developing a rigorous account of this relational inheritance is an important extension of the present framework.

16.12 Repair Conflicts and the Problem of Re-Generation

Repair is another site of underdetermination. Restoration may reproduce an unjust prior state. Revision may preserve a relation that some participants would prefer to leave. Re-generation may open new possibilities while empowering planners to redesign relations paternalistically. Compensation can acknowledge loss while leaving the generative rule unchanged. Structural reform can alter the rule while failing to address individual injury.

The paper's three-part vocabulary of restoration, revision, and re-generation helps distinguish these possibilities, but it does not rank them. Future work should examine how reparative strategies interact with authority, effective alternatives, temporal urgency, historical claims, and participant disagreement. It should also study repair institutions as relations in their own right. Long-term reparative administration can create new dependencies, gatekeeping powers, data systems, and professional interests. A repair process should therefore be evaluated not only by the wrong it addresses but also by the relation it generates.

16.13 Heterogeneity and Artificial Systems

The applications to artificial systems and heterogeneous relations remain intentionally cautious. The framework can analyze dependencies, infrastructural power, effective alternatives, revision rights, and generative rules without assuming that an artificial system possesses moral status. If stronger forms of artificial agency or moral patienthood become plausible, additional questions arise, but the present paper does not settle them.

Heterogeneous systems also create a comparison problem. A concept such as exit, revision, harm, continuity, or identity may not have the same structure across humans, animals, artificial agents, organizations, and future unfamiliar entities. The relational-becoming framework should therefore travel

by mechanism rather than by verbal analogy. Where the relevant mechanism is not shared, a common vocabulary can conceal rather than clarify difference.

16.14 Empirical and Formal Research Agenda

The framework remains largely conceptual. Its future value will depend on whether its distinctions can support empirical and formal work. Several research directions appear especially promising.

First, institutional case studies can reconstruct changes in effective generative rules before and after reforms, emergencies, platform adoption, or governance interventions. Second, legal and policy analysis can examine whether amendment, review, sunset, appeal, and exit mechanisms are merely formal or effectively usable. Third, historical studies can trace how seemingly minor institutional changes sediment into durable transformation authority. Fourth, network and dynamic-system models can represent reachable relational regions, branching capacity, and changes in effective transition structure where the assumptions are explicit enough to justify formalization. Fifth, archival and qualitative work can examine how later reinterpretations change present repair claims without collapsing historical responsibility.

These empirical projects should also be capable of showing where the framework adds little. If a conventional distributive, procedural, capability, or responsibility analysis explains a case completely, adding the language of generative rules or relational becoming would be unnecessary. The framework should be retained only where temporal sequence, lifecycle position, effective alternatives, generated effects, or future transformability materially change the analysis.

16.15 Relation to the Wider Research Programme

This paper also leaves several questions to neighboring projects. A more complete theory of responsibility under generated constraints requires deeper treatment of agency, coercion, free will, and option-space genealogy. A fuller theory of normative emergence must explain how historically generated norms can be criticized without silently appealing to an unexplained transcendent standard. A theory of recognizability must develop the archival and epistemic conditions under which future reinterpretation remains possible. The present paper interfaces with these questions but should not absorb them.

Its own contribution is narrower: to make relational history and transformability explicit objects of justice analysis. This provides a bridge between backward-looking histories, present relational structures, and prospective transformations without claiming that one temporal standpoint is always normatively prior.

16.16 A Restrained Interpretation of Justice of Relational Becoming

The phrase *justice of relational becoming* can sound broader than the argument warrants. In its restrained form, it names a discipline of asking additional questions before treating a relational state as the complete object of judgment. How was the relation formed? Which processes continue to reproduce it? What effective alternatives remain? What did an intervention actually generate? Who gained or lost transformation authority? Which future relational regions became easier or harder to reach? Which comparison rule made the case appear similar to another? How should later reinterpretation affect present repair without distorting historical responsibility?

These questions do not constitute a universal substantive theory. They define a temporal-generative field in which established normative theories can operate with greater precision. A capability theorist can ask how effective alternatives were generated and transformed. A republican can ask how changes in F_t redistribute arbitrary power. A relational egalitarian can ask whether a reform alters standing while preserving asymmetrical amendment authority. A procedural theorist can ask whether revision and contestation remain effectively available. A historical theorist can ask whether inherited structures continue to constitute the present relation.

The framework is most useful where a present-state description would otherwise hide these differences. It is least useful where history, lifecycle position, and future transformability are irrelevant to the

normative issue. Its ambition should therefore remain selective rather than totalizing.

The remaining challenge is not to show that relational becoming matters in the abstract. It is to determine, case by case and theory by theory, which dimensions of becoming are normatively relevant, how they can be evidenced, who has authority to act on them, and how repair can alter unjust relations without reproducing the very asymmetries it seeks to overcome.

17 Conclusion

This paper has argued that justice can require a wider object of evaluation than a present relational state. Relations are formed, maintained, revised, inherited, contested, exited, terminated, and sometimes replaced. Their present structure can carry the sediment of earlier transformations, while present interventions can alter not only immediate conditions but also the capacities through which later transformations become possible. A justice analysis that attends only to the current distribution of goods, rights, opportunities, or statuses can therefore miss features that remain normatively important because they concern how the relation came to be, how it continues to reproduce itself, and who can change it in the future.

The argument has been deliberately narrower than a general theory of justice. It does not propose a single substantive principle for ranking all relational transformations, nor does it claim that historical depth or future openness is always morally preferable. Instead, it develops a temporal-generative object of inquiry within which established normative theories can operate with greater precision. A capability account, a relational egalitarian account, a republican account, a procedural account, or a theory of structural responsibility may disagree about the relevant normative standard while still benefiting from a clearer account of the relation being judged. The contribution of the present framework lies in identifying dimensions that a present-state description can otherwise compress or conceal.

17.1 From Relational States to Relational Becoming

The first contribution is the treatment of relational history as potentially constitutive of the object of justice. Historical relevance is not established merely by chronological priority. Earlier events matter when they continue to structure present powers, dependencies, effective alternatives, claims, or institutional capacities. This is why two present relations that appear similar can remain normatively different when one was produced through coercive dependence, dispossession, exclusion, or the cumulative sedimentation of asymmetrical authority and the other was not.

This genealogical perspective also required limits. No relation can be understood through an indefinitely expanding history. Historical inquiry must therefore be purpose-indexed. The relevant question is not whether an event belongs to the past of a relation, but whether it remains constitutive of the normative problem being assessed. This distinction protects genealogical inquiry from becoming either superficial context gathering or total historical reconstruction.

The second contribution concerns the lifecycle of relations. Formation, maintenance, modification, suspension, exit, removal, and replacement are analytically distinct sites at which injustice can arise or be repaired. A relation can be fair in its initial formation but become unjust through maintenance. It can be substantively improved while preserving a prohibitively costly exit. It can be formally terminated while leaving behind dependencies, records, liabilities, or concentrated capacities that continue to structure the participants' futures. Lifecycle analysis therefore helps locate the site at which a remedy must operate rather than assuming that every relational problem is a problem of present distribution.

This perspective also clarifies why restoration is only one form of repair. Where a prior relation was itself unjust, return is not an adequate objective. Revision may be required when the relation should continue on different terms. Re-generation may be required when neither restoration nor incremental revision can produce defensible relational possibilities. These strategies are not interchangeable, and none is presumptively superior in every case.

17.2 Action, Effect, and Future Transformability

A third contribution is the separation of intention, implemented action, and generated relational effect. Ethical evaluation often moves too quickly from a justified purpose to a favorable assessment of intervention, or from a harmful consequence to a conclusion about culpability. The analysis developed here resists both shortcuts. Intention is one object of evaluation. Implementation is another. The relation actually generated by an intervention is a third. Responsibility for an adverse generated effect then requires additional inquiry into foreseeability, control, role, causal contribution, available alternatives, and historical position.

This distinction becomes particularly important in institutional and humanitarian contexts. An intervention can be undertaken for protective reasons, comply with its formal mandate, and nevertheless generate durable dependency or concentrated revision power. A governance reform can improve immediate participation while simultaneously making later amendment dependent on a narrower set of actors. A technical system can increase present efficiency while embedding future users within an architecture whose rules of modification they cannot meaningfully contest. The justice of these interventions cannot be inferred from either declared intention or immediate outcome alone.

The paper's most explicitly generative contribution is the treatment of future transformability as a potential object of justice. The formal pair (R_t, F_t) was introduced to distinguish a relational configuration from the effective structure governing how later relational change can occur. The point is not that social life can be exhaustively represented by a mathematical transition rule. The value of the distinction is analytical. Institutions distribute capacities to initiate change, approve it, veto it, challenge it, review it, refuse it, or leave the relation. When an intervention redistributes those capacities, it alters the effective generative structure of the relation.

This makes second-order transformation visible. A policy can change present conditions while also changing who will be able to revise the policy later. Emergency authority can solve an immediate problem while establishing durable administrative capacity. A platform can create new opportunities while concentrating control over the rules governing future participation. A reparative institution can restore resources while acquiring enduring gatekeeping power. In such cases, justice has reason to examine not only what changed, but how the conditions of future change were themselves redistributed.

The paper has not treated open-ended transformability as a supreme good. Stable commitments, constitutional constraints, durable protections, and credible long-term arrangements can require forms of rigidity. The relevant question is therefore not whether a relation remains maximally revisable, but whether the distribution and justification of transformation capacity are defensible in light of the relation, its history, its participants, and the normative purpose at issue.

17.3 Authority, Alternatives, and Comparison

A fourth contribution concerns authority over relational change. Correct diagnosis and legitimate authority are separate questions. An actor may understand a relation well while lacking standing to reorganize it. Conversely, an institution can possess formal authority while lacking adequate epistemic access to the effects of its intervention. Consent, public mandate, entrusted role, causal implication, affectedness, expertise, and emergency capacity can all be relevant, but none can be treated as a universal substitute for the others.

The distinction becomes even more important when an intervention changes the effective generative rule. Authority to address an immediate danger can be narrower than authority to redesign future amendment, review, participation, or exit. Temporary powers therefore require particular scrutiny when they become embedded in durable institutions. Reviewability, scope limits, sunset mechanisms, transfer arrangements, and effective contestation are not merely procedural details; they can determine whether a justified intervention becomes a new source of relational domination.

The analysis of effective alternatives and exit complements this authority inquiry. Formal permission to leave a relation does not establish meaningful exit when departure carries prohibitive material, social, informational, legal, or infrastructural costs. Exit is better understood as a relational capability whose

feasibility depends on the history and structure of the relation. Yet exit is not always the proper remedy. Collective goods, unavoidable institutions, dependency relations, ecological systems, and public infrastructures often require voice, revision, or shared governance rather than withdrawal. The framework therefore treats effective alternatives broadly rather than reducing freedom to the availability of an exit option.

Comparison introduced another layer of judgment. Justice inevitably abstracts. Institutions compare cases, identify precedents, define relevant similarity, and suppress differences deemed irrelevant to a particular purpose. The formal quotient construction used in this paper makes that selectivity explicit. Its normative significance lies not in rejecting abstraction, but in asking which differences are suppressed and why. A comparison that ignores a difference constitutive of the relevant burden can create false equivalence; a comparison that treats irrelevant variation as decisive can create false difference. Quotienting is therefore a site at which institutional judgment itself can become contestable.

17.4 Temporal Justice without Temporal Totalization

The paper has also connected retrospective, present, and prospective judgment without collapsing them into one temporal standpoint. Prospective justice asks which relational regions remain effectively reachable, which become foreclosed, and who possesses branching or steering capacity within the space of possible futures. This perspective is useful where present interventions generate lock-in or concentrate future revision power. It does not license unlimited speculation. Future-oriented judgment must remain tied to credible mechanisms, effective reachability, and uncertainty-sensitive reasoning.

Retrospective judgment presents the inverse challenge. Later evidence and concepts can transform how a past relation is understood. A harm that was poorly articulated at the time may later become visible through new interpretive resources. Yet present understanding cannot simply be projected backward as though historical actors possessed the same concepts, evidence, or institutional capacities. The paper therefore separates reinterpretation of a past relation from responsibility attribution to historical agents. This distinction allows historical judgment to change without making responsibility infinitely retrospective.

Institutional continuity complicates this picture because relations, assets, records, benefits, and organizational identities can persist across generations of personnel. Present institutions may therefore inherit reasons for acknowledgment, repair, or structural revision without inheriting personal culpability in the same form. This is one reason why repair must be understood relationally rather than solely as punishment of past actors.

The temporal account developed here should not be read as a demand to maximize historical preservation, future options, or permanent revisability. Justice sometimes requires closure. Evidence cannot always be retained indefinitely. Institutions need stable expectations. Participants may have legitimate interests in finality, privacy, forgetting, and durable commitment. The purpose of temporal analysis is therefore to make the consequences of closure visible and contestable, not to prohibit closure itself.

17.5 A Restrained Conception of Justice of Relational Becoming

The phrase *justice of relational becoming* is intended to name this expanded discipline of inquiry. It asks whether the relation under judgment can be understood adequately without considering its genealogy, lifecycle, generated effects, effective alternatives, transformation authority, comparison rules, future relational regions, and reparative possibilities. It does not imply that all of these dimensions matter equally in every case. Nor does it imply that the framework itself supplies a final substantive verdict.

Its most useful role is diagnostic and reconstructive. It can reveal when two apparently similar present states carry different normative histories. It can identify when a successful intervention creates problematic second-order capacities. It can distinguish an available formal remedy from an effective alternative. It can expose when the authority to solve an immediate problem has expanded into authority over future transformation. It can show when a comparison suppresses a difference central to the normative question.

It can also clarify when repair should restore, revise, or generate new relational possibilities rather than merely return participants to a prior state.

The framework is therefore complementary to, rather than a replacement for, established theories of justice. Different normative traditions can enter the same temporal-generative object and ask different substantive questions. A capability approach can investigate how histories and generative rules shape effective alternatives. Republican theory can examine whether future transformation capacities are subject to arbitrary control. Relational egalitarianism can ask whether standing is altered while asymmetrical amendment authority survives. Procedural theories can investigate whether review and contestation remain effectively available. Structural theories can trace distributed responsibility across the processes reproducing a relation. Historical theories can ask how inherited structures remain constitutive of present claims.

This plural compatibility is also a limit. The paper does not resolve conflicts among these normative traditions. It does not prove that preserving future options outweighs security, that revisability outweighs commitment, that exit outweighs voice, or that genealogical claims always defeat present expectations. Those judgments require additional normative premises and case-specific evidence.

The central proposal is consequently modest but consequential. Justice should not assume that the present relational state exhausts the object being judged. In cases where history remains constitutive, where interventions generate durable relational effects, or where the rules of future transformation are redistributed, justice may need to examine the becoming of the relation itself. Doing so makes visible forms of power, dependence, responsibility, and repair that can disappear when relational history and future transformability are compressed into a snapshot.

A relational world is never judged from nowhere and never transformed without generating further relations. The practical task is therefore not to seek a timelessly complete representation of relational becoming. It is to identify, with sufficient historical and institutional discipline, which dimensions of becoming are normatively relevant in the case at hand, what evidence supports that relevance, who has authority to respond, and how a response can avoid reproducing the asymmetries it is meant to address. That is the restrained sense in which justice can be concerned not only with relations as they are, but with how they have become and with the conditions under which they may become otherwise.

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