# A Preliminary Discussion of Normative Formation under Asymmetric Generative Capacity

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**Abstract**

This paper develops a preliminary account of normative formation under conditions in which heterogeneous sources possess unequal capacities to generate, stabilize, interpret, circulate, and revise normative structures. *Normative formation* is used broadly for the emergence of relatively stable concepts, evaluative distinctions, interpretive conventions, practical expectations, and recognized modes of reasoning and action; *normative grammar* serves only as an analytical analogy for partially stabilized relations among them. The central concern is relational and temporal. Differences in generative capacity may affect the relative influence of normative sources and, under some conditions, the later conditions through which other sources can participate in formation. The paper therefore distinguishes generative capacity from realized normative influence and develops the provisional concepts of endogenous weighting, generative crowding-out, and normative closure. Three case studies refine the framework from different directions: philosophical claim formation foregrounds argumentative provenance; international law foregrounds practice, identification, interpretation, and legally relevant history; aesthetic norm formation foregrounds pre-explicit differentiation and the possible co-formation of judgment and norm. The later analysis develops a trajectory-sensitive perspective in which the significance of asymmetry depends partly on its provenance, persistence, revisability, self-reinforcement, and effects on future generative capacities. The discussion remains exploratory and offers neither a complete theory of normativity or power nor a general metric of justice or institutional design.

**Keywords:** normative formation; asymmetric generative capacity; generative crowding-out; normative closure; normative trajectories

## Research Status and Scope

This paper is a preliminary conceptual inquiry into the formation of normative structures under conditions of heterogeneous and asymmetric generative capacity. Its use of *normative formation* is intentionally broader than formal rule-making. The inquiry includes the formation of concepts, evaluative categories, interpretive conventions, practical expectations, and socially recognized modes of reasoning and action where these acquire sufficient stability to shape subsequent interpretation or practice.

The paper does not assume that these heterogeneous formations share a single mechanism. The expression *normative grammar* functions as an analytical analogy for partially stabilized relations among distinctions, interpretations, evaluations, and practices. The analogy is intended to clarify structural features while preserving differences among philosophical argument, legal norm formation, aesthetic judgment, institutional practice, and other domains.

Three case studies are used for conceptual development rather than as empirical proof of a universal model. Philosophical claim formation is examined through argumentative provenance and the historical development of conceptual positions. International law is examined as a domain in which sources, practice, identification, interpretation, and historical accumulation interact in norm formation. Aesthetic norm formation is examined because perceptual and affective differentiation may precede explicit normative articulation while remaining historically and relationally shaped.

The paper's central proposal concerns asymmetric generative capacity. Different sources may possess unequal capacities to make interpretations visible, stabilize categories, shape recognized practices, and affect the conditions under which other sources participate in later formation. The argument remains exploratory. It does not reduce normative formation to power, identify asymmetry with injustice, or treat historical provenance as sufficient for normative validity. These relations are developed incrementally and remain open to revision in light of closer philosophical, doctrinal, historical, empirical, and comparative analysis.

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## Notices

**Status.** This working draft records a complete revised version of a conceptual inquiry into normative formation under asymmetric generative capacity. The principal argument, three case studies, figures, and conclusion have undergone manuscript-level revision for conceptual consistency, argumentative continuity, claim strength, and literature positioning. The terminology, case-study interpretation, and normative implications remain open to further refinement, especially where closer disciplinary or empirical work may require narrower distinctions.



**Statement on the use of language models.** The exploratory discussions and preparation of this paper involved OpenAI's ChatGPT. ChatGPT supported exploratory dialogue, conceptual differentiation, argumentative criticism, source discovery followed by website verification, and drafting in 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, analytical representations, arguments, conclusions, and errors. Authorship credit remains with the human author.

# 1 Introduction

Normative orders are often encountered in stabilized form. A concept appears to have an accepted meaning, a practice appears ordinary, a legal proposition is stated as a rule, an aesthetic judgment is expressed as if its object were already available for evaluation, or a philosophical position is compressed into a small number of claims. Such presentations are useful for communication, yet they can conceal the processes through which the relevant distinctions, interpretations, and expectations became available.

This paper develops a preliminary inquiry into those processes. Its central concern is the formation of normative structures when heterogeneous sources possess unequal capacities to generate, stabilize, interpret, circulate, and revise them. The inquiry is conceptual and interpretive, with particular attention to the relations among normative formation, generative asymmetry, interpretive authority, historical provenance, and temporal trajectory. These relations are examined comparatively while preserving differences among the domains in which they appear.

The term *normative formation* is used here in an intentionally broad and provisional sense. It includes the emergence and stabilization of distinctions through which conduct, interpretation, judgment, and practice become intelligible to participants. Formal rules form one part of this field. So do less explicit structures: expectations concerning appropriate conduct, recognized vocabularies of evaluation, conventions governing what counts as a relevant reason, inherited conceptual distinctions, professional standards, recurrent practices, and interpretive habits. The paper uses *normative grammar* as an analytical analogy for relatively stabilized relations among such elements. The analogy is intentionally looser than a formal grammar. It identifies a narrower analytical possibility: repeated relations among concepts, evaluations, and practices can make some interpretations easier to articulate, recognize, or act upon than others.

A formation perspective changes the object of analysis. A stabilized norm or claim can be examined through its present content, while its provenance raises a different set of questions. Which practices, inherited distinctions, institutions, experiences, arguments, and forms of authority contributed to its formation? Which alternatives were available at earlier stages? Which sources acquired greater capacity to shape the shared language through which later participants encountered the issue? Which interpretations became difficult to form, express, or recognize? These questions concern more than historical background. In some domains, the trajectory through which a normative structure emerged may contribute to its present intelligibility, authority, or practical force. The importance of provenance therefore varies by domain and requires local analysis rather than a general presumption.

The paper approaches this problem through the concept of *generative capacity*. In the present inquiry, generative capacity refers to the capacity of a source—an actor, practice, institution, tradition, conceptual resource, or other relationally situated formation—to participate in producing, modifying, stabilizing, transmitting, or reopening normative structures. The concept is deliberately broader than formal authority and narrower than an all-purpose theory of power. A source may possess substantial resources or symbolic standing while exerting limited influence in a particular normative relation. Conversely, repeated practice or a historically inherited distinction may exert considerable formative influence without possessing centralized institutional authority. Generative capacity therefore requires attention to both the properties of a source and the relations through which those properties become effective.

Asymmetry enters when these capacities are unevenly distributed. Such asymmetry is common in social and intellectual life because sources differ in knowledge, experience, historical accumulation, institutional position, visibility, coordination capacity, material resources, and access to channels of recognition. Asymmetry receives no automatic diagnosis of domination or injustice in this argument. Differences can support coordination, specialization, learning, and forms of generative change. The analytical difficulty arises when unequal capacity begins to affect the conditions under which other sources can participate in formation. A source with increasing influence may shape the categories through which competing interpretations are recognized, the procedures through which they become visible, or the standards by which they are evaluated. Under such conditions, capacity differences can become partly endogenous to the formation process: one source can influence the emerging norm and, at a second level, the practical conditions under which other sources acquire influence.

This possibility motivates two provisional concepts developed later in the paper. *Generative crowding-out* describes conditions in which the expansion of one source's effective formative capacity reduces the practical space through which other sources can contribute to subsequent formation. *Normative closure* describes a stronger condition in which participation, interpretation, or revision becomes sufficiently constrained that an existing normative structure reproduces itself with limited exposure to alternative sources. Both concepts require careful qualification. Greater influence can coexist with continued plural participation, and stabilization is often necessary for coordinated practice. The relevant question concerns how stabilization is produced, how alternatives remain available, and whether previously excluded or weakened sources can re-enter the formation process.

Decentralized formation changes the configuration of the problem. Distributed or bottom-up processes can widen participation, yet they can also generate new asymmetries through accumulated expertise, trust, visibility, network position, infrastructural control, or repeated recognition. The paper therefore avoids a simple opposition between centralized and decentralized norm formation. Its interest lies in the changing distribution of generative capacity and in the mechanisms through which that distribution affects later participation. Asymmetry can be imposed, inherited, accumulated, or emergent. Its normative significance may consequently depend upon a trajectory rather than a single snapshot.

The temporal dimension is especially important for this inquiry. A present configuration records the outcome of earlier interactions while also altering the conditions of later formation. Historical accumulation can stabilize a language, institution, or interpretive convention; it can also create path dependence, deepen authority, preserve memory, or enable correction through stored experience. A trajectory-sensitive analysis therefore asks how a present asymmetry was produced, how it has changed, what capacities it has generated or weakened, how reversible its effects remain, and what forms of future participation it enables. Such an analysis supplements static comparisons of position or distribution. Validity remains governed by domain-specific standards, and duration alone carries no presumption of authority.

Three case studies are used to develop these distinctions. The first concerns philosophical claim formation. Philosophical positions are frequently compressible into short statements, definitions, or theses, while their intelligibility can depend heavily upon the problems, inherited vocabularies, objections, revisions, and conceptual tensions through which they were formed. A philosophical claim therefore provides a useful case for examining *argumentative provenance*: the relation between a stabilized conceptual position and the trajectory of reasoning through which it became available. The case also illustrates why a concept can change meaning across an argument without becoming arbitrary, and why understanding a final claim may require reconstructing the path that made the claim intelligible.

The second case concerns international law. International law offers a domain in which normative formation is explicitly connected with sources, practice, interpretation, institutional recognition, and historical accumulation. It also makes several distinctions analytically unavoidable. The formation of a norm, the identification of an existing norm, the interpretation of its content, and its application in a particular setting are related processes with different participants and different forms of authority. International law therefore provides a useful case for examining distributed formation together with unequal capacities to make practices visible, legally salient, and interpretively influential. The case is used to refine the paper's conceptual vocabulary, allowing international law to place pressure on a still-developing theory.

The third case concerns aesthetic norm formation. Aesthetic judgment places pressure on any account that begins with fully articulated concepts or rules. Perceptual attention, affective response, embodied differentiation, familiarity, surprise, rhythm, proportion, tension, and other forms of experience can become salient before a participant possesses an explicit normative vocabulary for them. At the same time, aesthetic perception develops within histories of education, exposure, canon formation, material practice, cultural convention, and institutional recognition. The paper therefore considers a provisional co-evolutionary possibility: aesthetic judgment and aesthetic norm may develop recursively, with pre-explicit differentiation contributing to normative articulation and stabilized normative categories subsequently reshaping later perception and judgment. This case is especially useful for examining domains

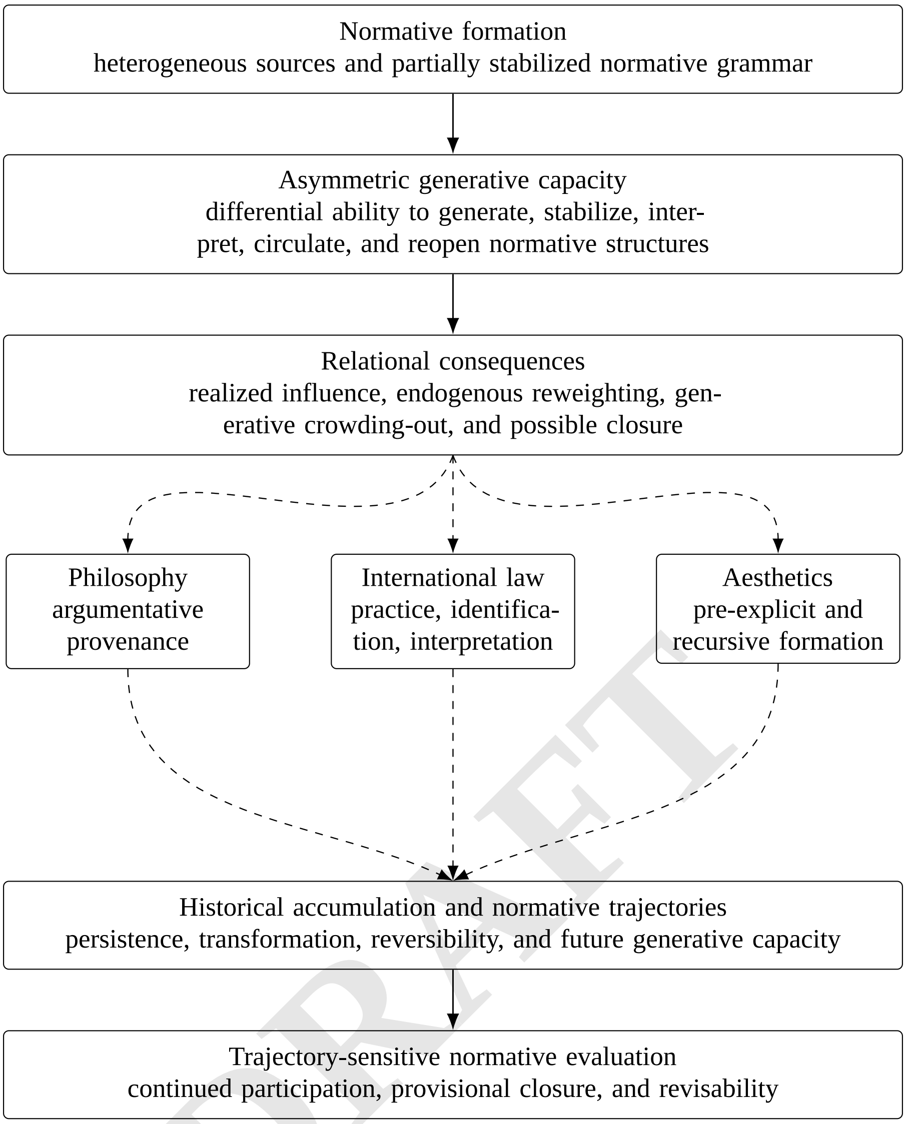


Figure 1: Analytical orientation of the paper. The three case studies function as distinct interpretive lenses within a continuous inquiry, each refining a different part of the argument.



in which explicit reasons underdetermine normative stabilization and in which asymmetric capacities of selection, exhibition, naming, teaching, criticism, and recognition may become comparatively consequential.

The three cases perform different analytical roles. Philosophy foregrounds the provenance of claims and the historical-relational formation of conceptual positions. International law foregrounds distributed practice, legal identification, interpretive authority, and historically accumulated normative force. Aesthetics foregrounds the relation between explicit norm formation and partially pre-explicit structures of perception and affect. Their differences are retained throughout the analysis. The paper does not assume that one mechanism can be transferred unchanged among philosophical reasoning, legal normativity, and aesthetic judgment. Their juxtaposition is intended to test which distinctions travel across domains and which require domain-specific revision.

Figure 1 presents the analytical orientation of the paper. The figure maps the inquiry without assigning a causal sequence. It shows how the initial problem of normative formation develops through heterogeneous sources and asymmetric generative capacity, how the three case studies illuminate different aspects of that problem, and how the resulting analysis opens into a temporal and evaluative discussion of continued normative generation.

The argument develops in four connected movements. Sections 2–4 establish the analytical scope of normative formation, its heterogeneous sources, and the idea of asymmetric generative capacity. Sections 5–8 then examine how capacity becomes effective, how prior influence can reshape later conditions of participation, and why decentralization can itself generate new asymmetries. The three case studies in Sections 9–11 place these distinctions under different forms of pressure: argumentative provenance in philosophy, historical and doctrinal formation in international law, and pre-explicit yet socially shaped differentiation in aesthetics. Sections 12–15 return from those cases to the temporal and evaluative problem of normative trajectories, continued generation, and the limits of the proposed framework. Section 16 gathers the resulting argument without treating the sequence as a universal model of norm formation.

The argument remains preliminary in two senses. First, the paper develops an analytical vocabulary rather than a complete theory of normativity. It does not claim that normative structures can be reduced to generative capacity, that power is the sole source of normative stabilization, or that historical provenance settles questions of validity. Second, the three case studies are used to expose distinctions and tensions rather than to establish a universal empirical law. The proposed concepts are therefore evaluated by their capacity to clarify relations that become difficult to see in a purely static account of norms. Their scope remains revisable as the argument moves across philosophy, international law, aesthetics, and the later normative analysis.

## 2 Normative Formation and Its Analytical Scope

Normative formation is the analytical object on which the rest of the paper depends, so its scope requires clarification before questions of asymmetry can be posed. The term is used for processes through which relatively stable structures of judgment and practice become available within relational settings. This usage also requires several boundaries: formation should remain distinct from validity, identification, interpretation, application, and enforcement, and the normative-grammar analogy should remain an analytical aid rather than an ontological claim. The discussion below therefore clarifies the object, the analogy, and the adjacent distinctions that later sections rely on, while leaving open the deeper metaphysical status of norms and the possibility that different domains require different accounts of normativity.

The expression *normative formation* refers here to processes through which distinctions bearing on judgment or practice acquire a degree of stability, recognizability, and practical relevance. Such distinctions can include explicit rules, yet the intended scope is wider. A community may stabilize expectations concerning what counts as a relevant reason, an appropriate response, a credible interpretation, a legitimate procedure, a serious objection, a refined aesthetic judgment, or an intelligible way of classifying an event. Some of these structures are formally articulated and some remain largely implicit in practice. Some carry legal or moral force, while others organize epistemic, professional, aesthetic, or institutional judgment. The present inquiry groups these phenomena together only at the level needed to study their formation. Their substantive forms of validity remain distinct.

This use of *normative* therefore concerns more than commands or duties. It includes structures through which participants distinguish more appropriate from less appropriate judgments or actions within a domain, and through which certain reasons, classifications, procedures, or performances receive greater recognition than alternatives. The relevant distinction is not exhausted by formal sanction. Normative significance may be expressed through justification, criticism, correction, recognition, exclusion, authorization, imitation, professional uptake, or durable expectations concerning how an activity is to be conducted. These modes differ substantially in strength and institutional form. Treating them as possible manifestations of normative formation does not establish that they share one source or one theory of validity.

A recurring regularity does not enter the present analysis merely because it is frequent. Repetition can matter to formation when it becomes connected with expectations, reasons, evaluative distinctions, recognized roles, or practices of correction and justification. A pattern of conduct may therefore remain a statistical regularity without acquiring normative significance, while a less frequent practice may carry considerable normative weight when participants or institutions treat it as exemplary, authoritative, required, or otherwise relevant to judgment. This distinction also prevents historical persistence from functioning as an automatic warrant. Duration can contribute to stabilization and recognizability while leaving the normative standing of the stabilized structure open to criticism.

Normative formation, in this sense, does not presuppose consensus. A norm can be contested while still organizing the terms of contestation. Participants may disagree over its interpretation, scope, authority, historical basis, or continued desirability while continuing to orient their claims toward it. Similarly, a normative vocabulary may be shared unevenly. One group may treat a distinction as central, another may accept it only for limited purposes, and a third may challenge the distinction itself. The existence of disagreement can therefore reveal the presence of a normative structure as readily as agreement, provided that the contested structure remains consequential for what participants can intelligibly claim, demand, reject, or revise.

The word *formation* emphasizes this temporal and revisable character and refers to a temporally extended family of processes rather than a single originating event. Normative structures may emerge through articulation, repetition, contestation, interpretation, institutionalization, transmission, and revision in varying orders. Explicit articulation can precede widespread practice, as when a proposed rule seeks to organize future conduct. Recurrent interaction can also precede articulation and later be formulated as a standard. Interpretation may modify an institutionalized rule, while changing practice can weaken a convention in the absence of formal repeal. Formation is therefore used as an umbrella term for a family of temporally extended processes through which normative structures become, remain, or cease to be socially or institutionally consequential.

The resulting analytical scope intersects with several familiar domains without being reducible to any one of them. Legal norm formation supplies especially clear instances of formal articulation, institutional recognition, and interpretive authority, but normative formation also occurs outside law. Moral reasoning concerns a major class of normative judgments, yet professional standards, epistemic expectations, aesthetic canons, and organizational practices cannot be assumed to derive from moral normativity. Cultural conventions and traditions can provide resources for formation, although a cultural pattern does not acquire normative status solely by being culturally embedded. Discourse can mediate formation by supplying concepts and classifications, but material practices, institutional procedures, embodied habits, technologies, and repeated interactions can also shape what later becomes articulable as a norm. The category is consequently broader than formal rule-making and narrower than social or cultural formation in general.

The paper uses the expression *normative grammar* to describe one aspect of this broader process. The expression functions as an analytical analogy. A grammar, in the present usage, denotes a partially stabilized set of relations among concepts, distinctions, reasons, roles, evaluations, and practical expectations through which some judgments and actions become easier to formulate, recognize, and coordinate. The analogy draws attention to patterned conditions of intelligibility and practice while leaving normative life open, partially explicit, and resistant to reconstruction as a closed formal calculus.

This usage has neighboring precedents while retaining a distinct scope. Brandom's normative pragmatics develops an account of linguistic meaning in terms of inferentially articulated social practices and the movement from implicit assessment to explicit discursive commitment [1]. Bicchieri, in a different social-norm tradition, uses the metaphor of a "grammar of society" to analyze norms, expectations, and their dynamics [2]. The present analogy is both broader and weaker: it is not a theory of linguistic content and is not limited to social norms in Bicchieri's sense. It marks partially stabilized relations that organize what can be recognized, evaluated, justified, or enacted within a domain, so that their formation and unequal reproduction can be examined.

The grammatical analogy is useful because a shared normative environment often does more than supply isolated rules. It can shape the contrasts through which an object is perceived, the vocabulary in which a dispute is stated, the reasons treated as relevant, the interpreters whose claims receive recognition, and the forms of action that appear ordinary, exceptional, permissible, or in need of justification.

These effects can persist amid substantive disagreement. A professional community may share standards of serious evidence while disagreeing over particular conclusions. A legal community may contest the meaning of a doctrine through procedures and categories that remain sufficiently shared to sustain the dispute. An aesthetic community may disagree over individual works while retaining historically developed distinctions through which works are noticed, compared, taught, criticized, and exhibited. In this sense, normative grammar names an enabling and constraining background of relations rather than a proposition to which participants uniformly assent.

Such grammars can be plural, overlapping, incomplete, and internally tense. A person can participate simultaneously in professional, legal, familial, aesthetic, scientific, religious, organizational, and other normative settings, with no guarantee that the relevant distinctions will align. Even within one domain, competing traditions can sustain partially incompatible standards of judgment. The analysis therefore treats normative grammars as locally and historically stabilized structures whose boundaries can remain porous and contested. Their relative stability makes coordinated action and mutual interpretation possible, while their incompleteness leaves room for revision, translation, and conflict.

The grammar analogy also permits a distinction between explicit articulation and the conditions from which articulation becomes possible. Normative formation need not begin with a fully verbalized rule. Participants can display patterns of attention, affective response, embodied orientation, imitation, or practical discrimination before they possess an explicit vocabulary that renders those patterns conceptually transparent. Later articulation can give such differentiations names, connect them with evaluative categories, and make them available for teaching, criticism, institutional recognition, or revision. Once stabilized, those categories can in turn influence subsequent attention and judgment. The paper leaves open how far these pre-explicit structures are biological, embodied, learned, cultural, material, or relational in particular cases. Their relevance here is methodological: an account of normative formation should remain open to forms of differentiation that precede complete propositional articulation.

This point becomes especially important in the aesthetic case developed in Section 11, where aesthetic response and explicit normative judgment may be recursively related. It also bears on the philosophical case in Section 9. A philosophical claim can eventually be stated in a compact proposition, while the distinctions that make the proposition intelligible may have been generated through an extended history of problems, objections, inherited concepts, and revisions. Philosophical claims are used here as an extended analytical case, since philosophical inquiry makes especially visible how standards of intelligibility, admissible reasons, and conceptual distinctions can themselves have a history of formation. The international-law case in Section 10 provides a different configuration in which practice, legal recognition, interpretation, and institutional authority are more directly connected with explicit normativity.

A further distinction concerns the difference between *formation* and *validity*. An explanation of how a normative structure acquired influence and an assessment of its justification, truth, legal validity, moral acceptability, aesthetic force, or epistemic soundness answer different questions. Historical provenance may be relevant to such assessments, although its relevance requires argument within the standards appropriate to the domain. The same caution applies in the opposite direction. Showing that a norm has a defensible content does not explain how it became available, authoritative, or practically consequential within a particular relational setting. Formation and validity are therefore analytically connected without being collapsed into one another.

Formation is also analytically distinct from *identification*, *interpretation*, *application*, and *enforcement*. These processes can overlap in practice, and a participant may contribute to several of them at once, yet they pose different questions. Formation concerns the processes through which a normative structure develops and stabilizes. Identification concerns the grounds on which participants treat such a structure as present or applicable within a recognized domain. Interpretation concerns the specification of its meaning, scope, or relation to other normative materials. Application concerns its use in a particular judgment or case. Enforcement concerns the mechanisms through which conformity is supported or nonconformity is made consequential. The international-law case will show why these distinctions matter when the actors who participate in practice, legal identification, authoritative interpretation, and application possess different forms of standing and influence.

These distinctions also clarify the paper's use of *relational*. A norm is relational here in the limited analytical sense that its formation and practical significance depend upon relations among participants, practices, institutions, interpretive resources, material conditions, and historical inheritances. The term permits unequal contributions and forms of normativity that extend beyond interpersonal agreement. A formally promulgated rule can remain relational because its meaning and efficacy depend upon interpretive and institutional relations; an inherited convention can remain relational because its reproduction depends upon patterns of recognition, teaching, imitation, contestation, and use. Relational analysis therefore asks how normative structures are sustained and transformed through configurations of dependence and interaction without presuming that the relevant relations are symmetrical.

The paper consequently approaches normative formation through a set of carefully limited commitments. Normative structures can have histories of formation, and multiple heterogeneous sources can participate in those histories. Partially stabilized grammars can condition intelligibility and practice while leaving room for contestation. Explicit articulation can emerge in relation with pre-explicit differentiation, and historical emergence can be studied separately from criteria of validity. These commitments define an analytical space rather than a complete theory of normativity. They leave open how particular norms should be justified, which forms of authority are legitimate, how strongly provenance should affect current evaluation, and which mechanisms dominate in any given domain.

Once normative formation is understood in this broader yet delimited sense, a further question becomes unavoidable. The processes described above rarely draw upon a single source. Traditions, institutional procedures, professional expertise, collective practices, material infrastructures, individual interpretations, and inherited vocabularies can participate simultaneously, and they can do so in different ways. Section 3 therefore turns to the heterogeneity of these sources. That discussion provides the necessary basis for the paper's later question concerning asymmetric generative capacity: differences in influence become analytically meaningful only after the forms of participation whose capacities differ have been made sufficiently clear.

## 3 Heterogeneous Sources of Normative Formation

Once normative formation is understood as a temporally extended process, its sources appear in heterogeneous forms. Traditions, institutions, practices, vocabularies, infrastructures, organizations, and situated interpretations can contribute through different modes and on different timescales. The discussion preserves this plurality before asking why some contributions become more formatively consequential than others; the source families below serve as an orienting taxonomy rather than an exhaustive classification. Several recurrent source families are considered first, followed by the relations among them, the possibility that a source changes role across time, and the significance of this heterogeneity for the later analysis of asymmetry.

A *source* here is any relationally situated formation whose activity, persistence, articulation, material organization, or inherited presence contributes to the emergence, stabilization, interpretation, or revision of a normative structure. The term is intentionally broader than *actor*. Persons and organizations can be sources, but so can inherited vocabularies, recurrent practices, technical infrastructures, institutional procedures, and sedimented traditions. Calling these formations sources leaves their modes of agency differentiated. It marks their analytical relevance to a process whose outcome cannot always be reconstructed from intentional decisions alone.

This distinction matters because normative formation is easily narrated through the most visible decision-maker. A rule may be promulgated by an office, a professional standard approved by a committee, a philosophical claim published under an author's name, or an aesthetic judgment articulated by a recognized critic. These moments can be consequential, yet the articulated result may rely upon a much longer history of conceptual inheritance, ordinary practice, training, material arrangements, and previous attempts at stabilization. The visible act of articulation can therefore concentrate authorship without exhausting provenance. A formation perspective keeps the articulating actor in view while recovering the less visible relations through which the articulation became intelligible and practically available.

One source family consists of inherited traditions and cultural repertoires. Past distinctions, narratives, exemplary practices, rituals, classifications, and habits of interpretation can remain available to later participants even when their original contexts have changed. Their formative role is not reducible to conscious obedience to tradition. An inherited distinction can continue to organize attention because it is embedded in language, education, ceremony, professional practice, or ordinary expectations. A later generation may affirm, reinterpret, combine, or reject such material, but even rejection can inherit the terms of the earlier problem. Historical inheritance can therefore supply both substantive norms and the conceptual contrasts through which new norms are formed.

A second family consists of institutions and organizations. Formal procedures, recognized offices, jurisdictional boundaries, accreditation systems, curricula, review practices, and organizational routines can stabilize normative expectations by giving them repeatable sites of articulation and application. Institutional contribution is especially visible where a decision changes status, entitlement, membership, or permissible action. Its formative role can also be quieter. A procedure that determines whose reasons must be heard, a format that determines what counts as an admissible submission, or a reporting system that renders some events legible and others difficult to record can shape normative formation before any final decision is made. Institutions therefore participate through both explicit rule production and the organization of the conditions under which interpretation and judgment occur.

Professional knowledge and conceptual resources form a third source family. Specialized vocabularies, evidential standards, disciplinary distinctions, methods of classification, and accumulated bodies of expertise can affect what participants are able to notice, compare, infer, or justify. Expertise can support normative formation by revealing distinctions that ordinary language leaves obscure, by preserving experience across cases, or by providing methods for testing claims. It can also narrow the accessible space of interpretation when a specialized vocabulary becomes difficult for outsiders to contest or when professional recognition becomes a practical condition for participation. The present section does not assign either tendency priority. It treats expertise as a distinct mode of generative participation whose effects depend upon the relations in which it operates.

Collective practice supplies another source. Repeated conduct can create expectations, establish reference points, and make certain forms of coordination appear ordinary even when no participant originally intended to create a norm. The relevant process is more specific than frequency alone. Practice becomes formatively important when repetition is accompanied by recognition, imitation, criticism, reliance, expectation, or some other relation through which the pattern begins to matter to subsequent judgment. Such processes can be highly distributed. They are especially important for the later discussion of international law, where practice and its legal significance cannot be reduced to a single centralized act of norm production.

Material and technical infrastructures can also participate in formation. Such arrangements change the practical visibility and cost of action. Platform architecture, database categories, voting interfaces, classroom arrangements, artistic media, and scientific instruments can each make some actions easier, some distinctions more visible, and some forms of participation more costly. These conditions can alter the space within which norms are articulated and reproduced while leaving the normative meaning of the resulting practices open to interpretation. A technical category that begins as an administrative convenience may later become a socially salient classification; an interface that privileges a particular sequence of actions may become incorporated into expectations of appropriate procedure. Material organization can therefore acquire normative relevance through use, interpretation, and institutional uptake.

Situated experience and individual interpretation form a further source family. Normative structures are reproduced and revised through persons whose histories, perceptions, affective responses, memories, and practical judgments are not identical. Individual interpretation matters even in highly institutionalized settings because general categories must be encountered in particular situations. Participants notice different aspects of a case, experience the costs of a rule differently, or develop alternative descriptions from positions that a dominant vocabulary does not fully represent. These differences can introduce variation into normative formation. Their practical effect, however, depends upon whether there are channels through which such interpretations can be expressed, recognized, translated, and retained.

The source families just described are summarized in Figure 2. The figure depicts a constellation whose relations need not form a pipeline. Its lines represent possible relations of participation and mutual

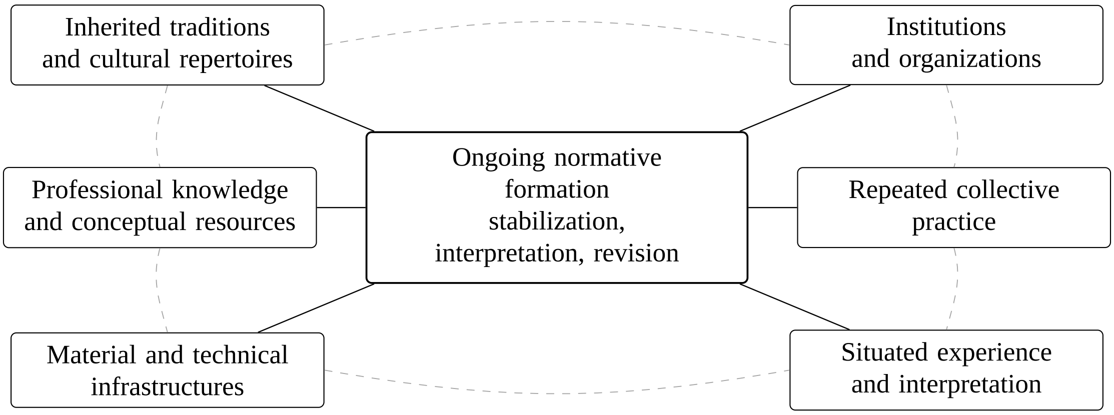


Figure 2: Heterogeneous sources of normative formation. The categories are analytical source families with porous and non-exhaustive boundaries. Solid lines indicate participation in an ongoing formation process; dashed lines indicate possible relations among sources through which their contributions can be conditioned or transformed.

conditioning, not fixed causal weights. The central formation is therefore shown as an ongoing relational process rather than as an output mechanically assembled from independent inputs.

The categories in Figure 2 are not mutually exclusive. A university can be analyzed as an organization, a carrier of traditions, a site of professional expertise, a material infrastructure, and a setting for repeated practice. A court can occupy an institutional position while also transmitting inherited interpretive methods and generating new practice through repeated decisions. An artistic school can be simultaneously a network of persons, a vocabulary of criticism, a set of techniques, and a historical tradition. The analytical task is therefore to identify the mode in which a formation contributes to the normative process under examination rather than to place each entity permanently within one category.

This overlap also means that the sources can transform one another. Repeated practice can become institutionalized; an institutional procedure can become a tradition; a technical classification can migrate into ordinary language; an individual interpretation can be taken up by a professional community; a professional distinction can be incorporated into law or organizational practice. Such transformations make provenance difficult to represent as a simple tree with a single origin. Normative formation is often better understood as a history of partial translations, sedimentations, and reorganizations among heterogeneous contributions.

The same formation can also move between source and outcome roles. A concept that first emerges from philosophical argument may later become part of an educational vocabulary through which new arguments are framed. A legal doctrine that initially stabilizes a pattern of judgment may later function as an interpretive resource for institutional reform. An aesthetic category that was once controversial can become part of a canon and thereby structure the perception of later works. The distinction between source and formed structure is consequently temporal and relational. What has been generated at one stage can become part of the generative environment at a later stage.

This recursive feature is central to the paper's later concern with asymmetric generative capacity. If formed structures can become future sources, then the consequences of an initial difference in influence need not remain confined to the moment in which it first appeared. A distinction that receives recognition can become easier to teach, cite, encode, institutionalize, or reproduce. A practice that becomes standard can alter what later participants encounter as the default. An interpretation that gains authority can shape the vocabulary through which alternatives subsequently need to present themselves. The present section does not yet evaluate these processes. It establishes why influence within normative formation can accumulate through transformations in the source environment itself.

Heterogeneity also complicates the idea of a common normative language. Shared coordination does not require that all participants derive their judgments from the same source. Two actors can converge upon a practice for different reasons: one through professional training, another through local tradition, another through institutional requirement, and another through repeated practical success. Apparent agreement at the level of conduct can therefore coexist with substantial differences in normative provenance. Conversely, actors drawing on a shared tradition can diverge when they occupy different institutions, possess different expertise, or encounter different material conditions. A stable normative grammar can thus rest upon partially overlapping rather than fully identical structures of understanding.

The plurality of sources also helps explain why normative change can occur without a complete rupture. A new interpretation may enter through one source while other components remain comparatively stable. Technical change can alter practice before explicit evaluative language changes. A new institutional procedure can coexist with inherited cultural expectations that are only slowly revised. A philosophical distinction can reorganize conceptual interpretation while leaving ordinary practices largely unchanged. Normative transformation can therefore be uneven across source families and across timescales. The later analysis of historical trajectories will return to this unevenness as a reason to resist descriptions of normative change as a single event.

At the same time, plural sourcing does not imply an equilibrium among sources. Some contributions may be highly visible while others remain difficult to articulate; some may possess recognized procedures of transmission while others rely on informal repetition; some may be encoded in durable institutions while others depend upon fragile interpersonal memory. A source can also influence a formation indirectly by changing another source rather than by entering the final normative articulation itself. Material infrastructure can alter patterns of collective practice; expertise can reshape institutional procedure; tradition can affect which forms of expertise are trusted; individual experience can motivate conceptual revision that is later absorbed by an organization. The effective structure of participation is therefore relational before it is unequal.

Heterogeneity alone leaves an important question unresolved. Differences in kind do not by themselves establish differences in formative capacity, and no source family carries an inherent claim to priority. In particular settings, however, participants and source formations can differ substantially in their ability to make interpretations visible, stabilize practices, authorize classifications, transmit concepts, preserve institutional memory, or reopen settled arrangements. The concept of *asymmetric generative capacity* developed in Section 4 addresses these differences without abandoning the heterogeneous source structure established here.

## 4 Asymmetric Generative Capacity

Source heterogeneity becomes analytically consequential when sources differ in their capacity to make a distinction available, sustain a practice, stabilize an interpretation, preserve a precedent, circulate a vocabulary, or reopen an established arrangement. *Generative capacity* names this situated ability to participate in the continuation of normative formation, and *asymmetry* refers to differences in that ability across relevant sources. The distinction is descriptive at this stage. Unequal generative capacity identifies a relational difference whose consequences depend on how the surrounding formation receives and transforms it; questions of domination, injustice, legitimacy, validity, and realized influence require further analysis.

Generative capacity refers here to the situated capacity of a participant, practice, institution, inherited formation, or other source to contribute to the generation, stabilization, transmission, interpretation, revision, or reproduction of a normative structure. The term *capacity* is chosen carefully. It concerns a possibility of effective participation whose effects remain to be realized. A person may possess unusual interpretive competence while lacking access to the forum in which an interpretation could be heard. An institution may possess formal authority while its directives receive little uptake in practice. A tradition may retain extensive symbolic recognition while losing its ability to organize conduct in a particular domain. A technical infrastructure may shape practice continuously even though few participants identify it as a normative source. These cases differ, but each illustrates why the ability to participate in formation should be distinguished from the influence that is ultimately realized.

The adjective *generative* also requires qualification. It includes recombination, preservation, translation, and revision, and it extends beyond the agency of individual subjects. A source can be generative by recombining inherited distinctions, translating an existing norm into a new domain, preserving a practice through a period of disruption, making a previously implicit expectation explicit, or creating the conditions under which other participants can formulate and test alternatives. Generativity can therefore include maintenance as well as innovation. A legal doctrine that stabilizes expectations across cases, a professional vocabulary that permits a new disagreement to become articulable, or an archive that preserves an otherwise fragile practice can each participate in future formation without originating the relevant normative materials in an absolute sense.

This broader usage is important because normative change is rarely generated by isolated novelty. Much formation occurs through selective inheritance. Earlier concepts, practices, and institutional arrangements are retained, recombined, translated, or challenged under changing conditions. A source with substantial generative capacity may therefore affect future possibilities by determining which inherited materials remain available for further use. Capacity can reside in the ability to preserve as well as in the ability to alter. The historical importance of libraries, courts, professional schools, archives, ritualized practices, technical standards, and durable organizational procedures is partly intelligible in these terms: each can transmit normative materials across time and thereby shape the repertoire from which later participants work.

Generative capacity is relational: its extent depends on the source's position within a particular environment. The same participant can possess substantial capacity in one setting and very little in another. Professional expertise can matter greatly where specialized reasons are institutionally recognized and much less where the relevant forum does not accept the professional vocabulary through which that expertise is expressed. A local tradition can organize everyday practice strongly while carrying limited weight in a distant administrative procedure. An institutional office can authorize a formal decision while leaving the interpretation of that decision substantially open to another community. Capacity therefore depends upon the relation among a source, the available channels of participation, the object of formation, and the surrounding configuration of other sources.

This relational character also means that generative capacity is domain specific. There is little analytical value in assigning a participant a single general quantity of normative capacity. A person who can influence the interpretation of a technical standard may possess little capacity to alter an aesthetic canon. An organization that controls access to a professional credential may have substantial capacity over the standards attached to that credential while possessing limited capacity over the informal practices of those who hold it. A philosopher whose conceptual vocabulary becomes highly influential in one intellectual tradition may remain marginal in another. The relevant question therefore concerns what a source can generate, stabilize, transmit, or revise within a particular relational field; abstract possession of power is too coarse for this purpose.

Several conditions can support generative capacity, with different combinations becoming salient across domains. Where explicit reasons are expected, the ability to articulate a distinction in a recognized vocabulary can be decisive. Expertise can make an interpretation intelligible within a specialized practice, while reputation and accumulated recognition can affect whether a claim is heard as credible. Institutional position can attach procedural consequences to judgment.

Other supports concern reach, repetition, and persistence. Access to publication venues, classrooms, courts, markets, platforms, or comparable channels can determine whether an articulation reaches participants able to retain or reproduce it. Material resources can sustain transmission; technical infrastructures can embed categories or defaults into recurrent action; numerical prevalence can stabilize expectations without centralized authority; and historical persistence can make a distinction available as a default reference point. These supports neither operate uniformly nor provide a universal measure of generative capacity. Their significance lies in the relational conditions through which a capacity becomes available and effective.

The resulting asymmetries can take different forms. Some are episodic. A person who happens to possess relevant information at a critical moment can temporarily shape an emerging interpretation and lose that advantage once the information becomes common. Other asymmetries are durable because they are supported by roles, institutions, infrastructures, or inherited patterns of recognition. Some remain highly localized, while others travel across domains through education, law, markets, professional certification, or widely used technical systems. Some asymmetries are complementary: participants with different capacities contribute distinct forms of judgment that make a practice possible. Others can become substitutive or exclusionary when one source acquires the ability to displace, filter, or redefine the conditions under which alternatives can participate. The later sections examine these stronger possibilities. The present point is that the word *asymmetry* names a family of relational differences whose consequences cannot be inferred from the existence of difference alone.

This distinction is especially important for the relation between asymmetry and power. Asymmetry is treated as analytically prior to any fuller account of power. A novice–expert difference can create unequal capacities for technical judgment without giving the expert comprehensive control over the novice's conduct. A historically established vocabulary can structure a field of interpretation without being attributable to a single actor who commands others. A widely used technical platform can make some classifications easier to reproduce without possessing authority in the legal or moral sense. Conversely, power can depend upon several asymmetries at once: control over resources, recognized authority, organizational position, access to information, or the ability to impose costs can combine to affect future participation. Treating asymmetry as analytically prior to a full theory of power allows these different configurations to remain visible.

The same restraint applies to authority. Authority is one possible relation through which generative capacity can be supported, yet capacity and authority are not equivalent. A judge, editor, teacher, religious officeholder, professional body, or organizational leader can occupy a recognized position from which certain interpretations receive special standing. The extent to which that standing produces durable normative formation depends on uptake, contestability, transmission, and the continuing relations in which the judgment is embedded. Informal actors can also possess considerable generative capacity without recognized authority, for example when a practice spreads through imitation or when a vocabulary becomes widely useful before an institution formally acknowledges it. Separating capacity from authority helps preserve the distinction between institutional recognition and broader processes of formation.

Normative validity remains a separate question. A source can be highly effective in stabilizing a norm that later participants judge to be unjustified, incoherent, harmful, obsolete, or otherwise in need of revision. A weakly positioned source can articulate a judgment that is later accepted as better supported. The present concept therefore concerns the conditions of formation, leaving justification to the standards appropriate to the domain. This distinction is indispensable for a paper that later considers normative evaluation. Without it, an account of how norms acquire stability could be mistaken for an account of why those norms deserve endorsement.

Asymmetry can nevertheless matter even when the stronger source is reasonable, competent, or beneficial. An institution may centralize interpretive capacity in order to coordinate action quickly. A professional community may give greater weight to specialized expertise because some decisions require accumulated knowledge. A teacher may temporarily structure a learning environment in ways that students cannot equally determine at the beginning of study. A court may be authorized to resolve a dispute because coordinated legal action requires a recognized decision. These arrangements can be defensible within their domains, yet they still create differences in generative capacity. The analytical question concerns what those differences do over time: whether they remain limited to a role, whether they expand into control over adjacent forms of participation, whether they cultivate new capacities in others, and whether participants retain meaningful possibilities of revision and challenge.

This temporal dimension connects asymmetry to the paper's broader concern with formation. A difference in capacity at one moment can alter the environment in which later capacities develop. A recognized interpretation can become easier to cite, teach, encode, or institutionalize. A repeatedly used classification can become the default language in which new cases are described. A procedure can produce records that make some forms of experience more visible and others less easily retrievable. A successful artistic category can organize later training and exhibition. A philosophical distinction can become part of the vocabulary through which subsequent objections are formulated. These processes do not guarantee cumulative advantage, because later contestation can weaken, redirect, or reverse them. They do show why asymmetry can have effects that extend beyond the original difference in capacity.

The possibility of such extension supports a cautious analogy with gradients or potentials in dynamical systems. The analogy is limited and does not establish a physical ontology of social life. It draws attention to the possibility that relational differences can make some transformations easier to initiate or sustain than others. A difference in access, recognition, institutional position, or accumulated practice can create a directional tendency in normative development without mechanically determining its outcome. The trajectory that follows remains dependent upon other sources, countervailing capacities, interpretation, contingency, and the specific mechanisms through which the difference becomes consequential. The analogy therefore concerns the availability of change rather than a law of social motion.

This point also clarifies why complete symmetry is neither assumed nor adopted as an evaluative baseline. Normative formation occurs among participants and sources that differ in experience, expertise, responsibility, historical position, material access, institutional role, and temporal persistence. Even a process designed to distribute participation widely can generate new asymmetries as some participants acquire knowledge, trust, organizational memory, or coordinating roles. The presence of asymmetry therefore supplies too little information for an evaluation by itself. Later analysis will ask whether a given asymmetry remains contestable, how it affects the formation of future capacities, whether it narrows or expands the participation of other sources, and how its consequences unfold across time.

A further difficulty is that the relevant unit of asymmetry need not always be an individual actor. Section 3 identified traditions, institutions, practices, infrastructures, expertise, and situated experience as analytically distinct sources. These formations can exhibit unequal generative capacities even where no participant deliberately constructs the inequality. A long-established conceptual vocabulary can have greater persistence than a newly articulated alternative. A standardized technical format can reproduce classifications more reliably than an informal practice. An institutional archive can preserve one kind of evidence more effectively than another. A dominant medium can make some forms of expression easier to circulate. Analysis therefore needs to distinguish intentional exercises of capacity from asymmetries produced through historical accumulation, infrastructural design, repeated practice, or other distributed processes.

The distinction becomes particularly important where normative formation includes pre-explicit or weakly articulated material. Aesthetic response offers a later example. A perceptual or affective differentiation can participate in judgment before the participant possesses a stable vocabulary for describing it. The capacity of such experience to enter shared normative formation then depends partly on whether it can be expressed, recognized, compared, taught, criticized, or embodied in practices that others can encounter. Similar issues arise whenever local experience does not readily fit the categories used by a formal institution or professional language. Generative capacity therefore concerns more than the possession of reasons; it also concerns the conditions under which experience and interpretation can become available to a shared process of formation.

These observations make it possible to state the paper's use of *asymmetric generative capacity* more precisely. The expression denotes a relational condition in which the sources relevant to a process of normative formation possess unequal capacities to contribute to the generation, stabilization, transmission, interpretation, revision, or reproduction of the normative structures at issue. The asymmetry is specific to a domain and a configuration of relations. It can be temporary or durable, explicit or implicit, intentional or historically accumulated. Its presence does not establish the normative standing of the resulting formation, and it does not by itself identify the mechanism through which capacity becomes effective.

A capacity can remain unrealized, and similar capacities can produce very different consequences under different relational conditions. Visibility, recognition, procedural access, timing, competing sources, institutional uptake, and the interpretive environment all mediate whether an available capacity becomes effective. This gap between availability and consequence motivates the distinction between *generative capacity* and *realized normative influence*: the situated ability to contribute is analytically separable from the effects that contribution acquires within a trajectory of formation.

## 5 Generative Capacity and Realized Normative Influence

Generative capacity does not tell us by itself what becomes consequential in a particular formation. A source may possess substantial competence, authority, resources, or historical standing while its contribution remains peripheral; a comparatively limited capacity may become decisive when access, timing, recognition, institutional position, or material support make it unusually effective. The distinction developed here is therefore between the availability of a formative capacity and its *realized normative influence*. The two remain continuous parts of one relational process, but separating them helps identify the conditions through which a possible contribution acquires actual consequences.

The distinction is partly counterfactual. Generative capacity concerns what a source is able to contribute under a relevant configuration of relations; realized normative influence concerns the discernible consequences of that contribution within a particular trajectory of formation. The two should not be separated into an inner potential and an external effect as though capacity were a self-contained property stored within an actor. The capacity itself is already relational. A person's expertise has little formative relevance where no channel carries it into the process at issue. An institutional office has limited generative reach outside the domain in which its decisions are recognized. An inherited practice can persist while ceasing to shape a new setting once participants stop treating it as meaningful. The analytical distinction therefore concerns two moments within a relational process: the conditions that make contribution possible and the consequences that are actually realized.

One mediating condition is *access*. A source can influence normative formation only through some path of entry into the relevant relations. Access can take formal forms, such as standing in a procedure, membership in a committee, publication within a recognized forum, or authority to issue a decision. It can also be informal: repeated presence, social proximity, ordinary imitation, artistic circulation, pedagogical transmission, or the ability to introduce a vocabulary into common use. Unequal access does not map perfectly onto unequal generative capacity, because actors can sometimes create new channels or operate through indirect ones. It nevertheless affects whether an available interpretation, experience, or practice can become part of the shared formation process.

A second condition is *legibility*. Contributions need to become sufficiently intelligible within the receiving environment to participate in formation. Legibility can depend on language, genre, evidential form, classification, professional vocabulary, stylistic convention, or the material format through which a contribution appears. A local experience can remain normatively consequential for the persons who undergo it while being difficult to translate into the categories used by a formal institution. An aesthetic response can be vivid before the participant possesses a critical vocabulary with which to articulate it. A philosophical objection can fail to enter a debate when it relies on distinctions that the prevailing conceptual grammar does not yet recognize. Legibility therefore mediates influence without reducing normative formation to linguistic expression alone.

Recognition supplies a further mediation. A contribution can be accessible and intelligible while receiving little weight because the source lacks credibility, status, institutional acknowledgment, or an established relation of trust. The same sentence can acquire markedly different practical consequences when spoken by a student, a recognized expert, an office-holder, a judge, a critic, or a widely cited scholar. The variation does not establish that the better-positioned speaker is epistemically or normatively correct. It shows that recognition can alter the probability that an interpretation will be heard, retained, repeated, or acted upon. Recognition can also operate impersonally. A familiar category, canonical text, standard form, or established procedure can be received with less friction than a newly introduced alternative because previous recognition has already stabilized its place within the normative environment.

Timing can be equally important. Normative formations are not equally receptive to revision at every moment. Periods of institutional transition, conceptual uncertainty, technological change, generational replacement, crisis, or reorganization can alter which contributions become consequential. A proposal that has little effect in a settled environment can become formative when an existing arrangement loses coherence or when participants actively search for new categories. Conversely, a contribution with substantial intellectual or practical resources can arrive after a decision, convention, or infrastructure has

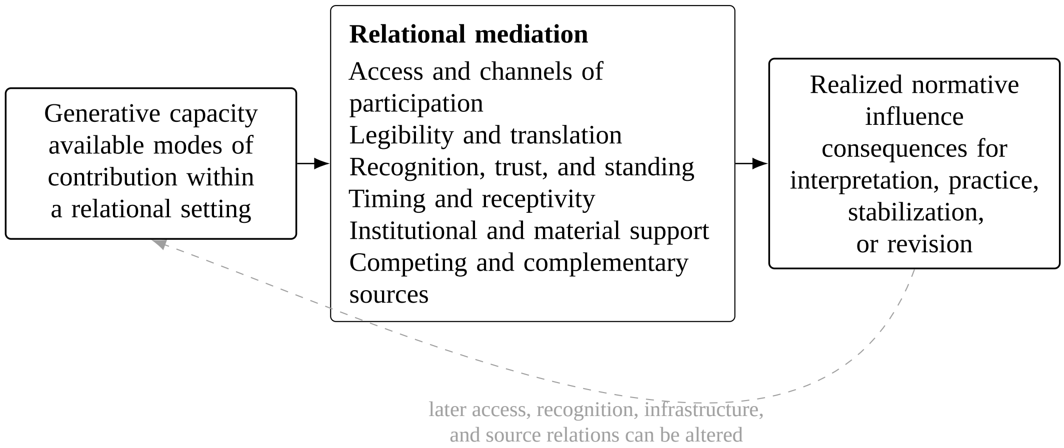


Figure 3: Relational realization of generative capacity. The central conditions are mediating features of a relational environment whose ordering can vary across cases. They can amplify, redirect, or attenuate the consequences of an available capacity. The dashed relation indicates that realized influence can alter the environment in which later capacities are exercised.

become difficult to reopen. Realized influence therefore depends partly on when a source encounters the formation, not solely on what the source contains.

Material and institutional supports can preserve or amplify an influence once it has begun. Records, curricula, archives, databases, standards, contractual forms, citation practices, exhibitions, technical interfaces, and routine procedures can extend the temporal reach of a judgment beyond the interaction in which it first appeared. Such supports can make a contribution easier to retrieve and reproduce, thereby increasing its presence in later episodes of formation. Their role is especially important for understanding why influence can persist after the original actor has left the scene. A classification encoded into an administrative system, for example, can continue to organize subsequent decisions even when later participants have little knowledge of its origin. Realized influence can therefore migrate from interpersonal uptake into material or institutional persistence.

The contribution of a source is also conditioned by competing and complementary sources. A professional interpretation may carry substantial recognized authority while encountering a durable local practice that limits its uptake. A formal rule can remain weakly consequential where organizational routines repeatedly redirect its application. A newly articulated aesthetic category can spread quickly when it resonates with existing perceptual habits, media forms, and institutional interests. A philosophical distinction can gain influence because it supplies language for a tension already encountered across several domains. The relevant effect is relational composition: the same capacity can be amplified, redirected, translated, or attenuated by the source environment into which it enters.

Figure 3 summarizes this distinction. The figure should be read as a relational map whose mediating conditions need not occur in a linear sequence. It identifies recurrent conditions that can mediate the movement from an available generative capacity to consequences within normative formation, while also showing that those consequences feed back into the environment in which later capacities are exercised.

Realized influence need not take the form of agreement. A contribution can become normatively consequential by provoking resistance, forcing a distinction to be clarified, making an excluded experience visible, or altering the reasons that participants consider relevant. An objection that is rejected can still change the subsequent formulation of a doctrine. A work that initially attracts hostile criticism can alter the categories of aesthetic judgment through which later works are evaluated. A minority interpretation can prompt an institution to articulate a previously implicit rule. Influence therefore concerns changes in the formative environment, including changes produced through disagreement, through effects that extend beyond acceptance.

Influence can also be direct or indirect. Direct influence is comparatively easy to recognize when a decision, argument, practice, or interpretation is explicitly adopted. Indirect influence can occur when a source modifies the conditions under which other sources operate. A technical infrastructure can make one kind of evidence easier to collect, thereby strengthening the practical position of a professional vocabulary that relies on that evidence. A training practice can make later participants more receptive to a particular form of reasoning. A legal procedure can reorganize which experiences become recorded and therefore available for later interpretation. These indirect effects are especially important for the next section because they begin to blur the boundary between influencing a normative outcome and influencing the structure through which future influence is allocated.

The durability of realized influence varies. Some consequences are episodic: a particular interpretation affects one decision and leaves little trace. Others become recurrent because they are retained in memory, practice, documentation, infrastructure, or institutional routine. Durability should therefore be separated from immediate intensity. A highly visible intervention can have a short normative life, while a modest procedural convention can persist quietly across many iterations. This difference reinforces the paper's later emphasis on trajectory. The normative significance of an influence often exceeds the magnitude of its immediate effect; the ways in which it is retained, reproduced, contested, and transformed can matter more over time.

The distinction between capacity and influence also helps preserve a place for contingency. Normative formation is rarely controlled by one source even where generative capacities are sharply unequal. Unanticipated events, changes in attention, translation across domains, new participants, technical disruptions, and shifts in institutional priorities can alter which capacities become consequential. A source that appears weak under one configuration can acquire new relevance when relations change. A source that previously dominated a formation can lose influence when its supporting channels weaken or when a new vocabulary reorganizes the problem. Treating realized influence as relational therefore leaves room for surprise without denying the importance of durable asymmetries.

At the same time, contingency does not erase patterned advantage. Where access, recognition, legibility, institutional support, and durable records repeatedly favor the same source, generative capacity can be realized with comparatively little friction. Repetition can then make the favorable conditions themselves part of the normative environment. Participants learn where authoritative judgments are expected to come from, which formats are likely to be accepted, which vocabularies travel easily, and which interpretations are costly to advance. A history of realized influence can thus affect later expectations before any new substantive judgment is made.

When a history of realized influence begins to reshape access, recognition, legibility, institutional support, or the relative visibility of competing sources, the mediating environment becomes partly shaped by the formation it helps to organize. Influence then acquires a second-order effect: it changes the conditions through which later influence becomes possible. This recursive possibility motivates the account of endogenous weighting developed next.

## 6 Endogenous Weighting in Normative Formation

The distinction between capacity and realized influence introduces a recursive possibility. Once a source has acquired influence, the consequences of that influence may alter the access, legibility, recognition, institutional support, or persistence through which later contributions are received. Normative formation can in this way reshape the effective distribution of formative significance within its own subsequent development. The term *endogenous weighting* is used for this second-order possibility: changes in the relative significance of normative sources that arise partly through earlier episodes of the same formation process.

The language of weighting requires care. The term is used here without assuming that each normative source carries a determinate numerical coefficient or that a collective norm results from adding independently measurable contributions. "Weight" refers more modestly to the effective significance a source acquires within a particular formation: how readily its contributions enter, how seriously they are received, how durably they are retained, and how strongly they shape later interpretation or practice. Such significance can remain qualitative, multidimensional, and context dependent. The analytical question is whether these conditions are given independently of the formation under study or whether earlier normative consequences help to reorganize them.

An initially simple case can clarify the distinction. Consider a professional community in which several forms of evidence are available. If an established procedure gives one form greater relevance for reasons fixed outside the present controversy, the resulting asymmetry can be treated provisionally as an exogenous condition of the local formation. If repeated decisions favoring that form of evidence later reshape training, documentation, publication practice, technical infrastructure, and expectations of competent reasoning, the same asymmetry begins to reproduce some of its own supporting conditions. Future participants then encounter an environment in which the previously favored form is easier to produce, easier to recognize, and more closely associated with legitimate judgment. The weighting has become partly endogenous.

This recursion can occur without deliberate control. Participants may simply repeat a classification because it has become familiar, invest in an infrastructure because many earlier decisions already rely on it, or teach a vocabulary because it is the vocabulary through which existing materials can most easily be understood. A source can therefore gain additional formative significance through accumulated compatibility with the environment, including cases with no explicit attempt to suppress alternatives. Path dependence is one possible result, while endogenous weighting refers more broadly to changes in the relational conditions of later influence. The relevant point is narrower: realized influence can modify the relational conditions of later influence.

Recognition provides one recurrent route. A source that has repeatedly shaped accepted judgments can acquire a presumption of relevance. Later participants may consult it earlier, devote more interpretive effort to it, or regard a departure from it as requiring additional justification. The resulting advantage need not rest on coercion. It can emerge from trust, accumulated success, institutional memory, professional convention, or simple familiarity. Yet recognition can become self-reinforcing when repeated consultation produces further opportunities to demonstrate relevance, while less consulted sources receive fewer opportunities to become familiar or authoritative. A difference in past influence then becomes part of the background through which present credibility is distributed.

Legibility can be reorganized in a similar way. Normative formation relies on categories through which experiences, reasons, and practices become available for collective interpretation. When one vocabulary becomes central to repeated decisions, participants may learn to translate new situations into its terms. Records can be designed around its classifications, educational materials can teach its distinctions, and institutional interfaces can require its fields and formats. These developments can increase consistency and facilitate coordination. They can also raise the translation cost faced by contributions that arise in a different conceptual register. The relevant issue concerns the degree to which the success of a particular language helps determine which future contributions can become legible with comparatively little conversion and which require substantial translation.

Access can likewise be affected by prior formation. A repeatedly influential practice may be assigned a formal place in a procedure; a previously informal role may become an office; a widely used method may receive dedicated funding; a recurring perspective may obtain representation in a committee, curriculum, archive, or technical system. These arrangements can preserve valuable knowledge and reduce the cost of repeated coordination. They also distribute future opportunities for participation. Where prior influence helps determine who receives standing, time, resources, or institutional presence, the process begins to shape the channels through which its own later revision can occur.

Material persistence can make such effects especially durable. Normative judgments often leave traces in documents, classifications, infrastructures, architectures, interfaces, and routines. These traces can continue to structure later practice even when participants no longer endorse the original reasons in full or no longer know the history through which the arrangement emerged. A technical field that requires one kind of entry makes some information cheap to record and other information costly to

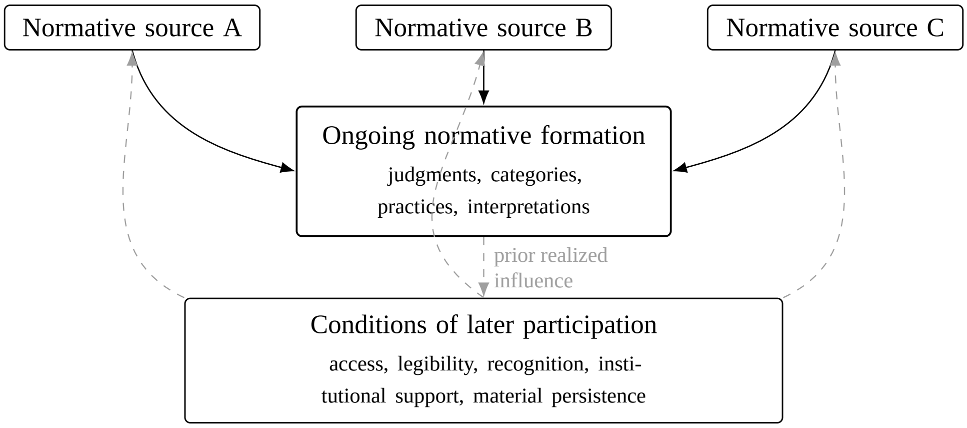


Figure 4: Endogenous reweighting in normative formation. Heterogeneous sources participate in an ongoing formation, while prior realized influence can alter conditions of later participation. The dashed relations represent possible second-order effects on access, legibility, recognition, institutional support, and material persistence; their strength and causal form remain open.

preserve. A standardized form can make one distinction routine while leaving another dependent on free-text explanation. A canon, archive, or curriculum can make some sources continuously available for reinterpretation while others require active recovery. In such cases, endogenous weighting is carried partly by material arrangements rather than by the continuing intention of any single actor.

The recursive structure can be described as a distinction between *first-order* and *second-order* normative influence. First-order influence concerns the effect of a contribution on a judgment, interpretation, practice, or other object of formation. Second-order influence concerns changes to the conditions through which later contributions acquire access, intelligibility, recognition, durability, or institutional support. The two forms frequently overlap. A judicial interpretation, philosophical distinction, professional standard, or aesthetic classification can settle a local question while simultaneously altering the vocabulary and expectations used in later questions. The second-order effect can remain modest, domain specific, and reversible; its analytical importance lies in the change it produces in the formative environment, alongside any change in magnitude.

Figure 4 represents this recursive relation. The figure uses no quantitative weights for the sources. It distinguishes a shared formative environment from the heterogeneous sources that participate in it and shows how prior realized influence can feed back into the conditions of later participation. The dashed relations indicate possible second-order effects and leave their causal pathways open.

Endogenous weighting is an analytical mechanism whose normative and epistemic status depends on its operation in a particular setting. Some reweighting can be functionally valuable. A community can reasonably assign greater significance to demonstrated expertise; a legal process can preserve precedent to maintain continuity; an organization can formalize a practice that repeatedly coordinates action well; a scholarly field can stabilize terminology that permits cumulative inquiry. A formation that continually discarded the consequences of earlier learning would bear substantial coordination and epistemic costs. The evaluative problem therefore concerns the form, degree, persistence, and revisability of reweighting, together with its effects on the continued participation of alternative sources.

This qualification matters because the same mechanisms that support cumulative learning can also narrow the field of later formation. Recognition can become so concentrated that unfamiliar sources are treated as presumptively irrelevant. Legibility requirements can become so specific that experiences expressed in other vocabularies disappear during translation. Institutionalized access can stabilize participation for some sources while making entry costly for others. Material infrastructures can preserve one set of distinctions while making alternatives difficult to record. These outcomes can arise incrementally even where each local decision appears defensible in isolation. The cumulative pattern becomes visible only when the formation is examined across time.

The paper uses the term *generative crowding-out* for a more restrictive configuration within this broader family of processes. Generative crowding-out occurs when the increasing effective significance of one source, or a closely aligned set of sources, materially reduces the capacity of other relevant sources to participate in subsequent normative formation. The reduction can operate through diminished access, lower recognition, greater translation cost, loss of institutional support, reduced visibility, or erosion of the practical conditions needed to reproduce an alternative vocabulary or practice. The term therefore concerns a change in continued formative capacity. Differences in agreement alone provide insufficient evidence for crowding-out.

Several limits follow from this definition. First, crowding-out is relational and domain specific. A source can be marginalized within one institution while remaining generative elsewhere. Second, crowding-out can be partial. An alternative source can continue to exist culturally or intellectually while losing much of its ability to affect a particular formation. Third, crowding-out can be reversible when channels of participation reopen, new translations become available, institutional arrangements change, or previously marginal sources acquire renewed relevance. Fourth, unequal influence alone is insufficient to establish crowding-out. The stronger condition concerns the weakening of other sources' future formative capacities or access to the formation process.

This distinction also separates generative crowding-out from ordinary selection. Normative formation necessarily involves some differentiation among reasons, practices, and interpretations. A community that treated every contribution as equally relevant in every context would have difficulty making judgments or sustaining coordinated action. Selection becomes analytically closer to crowding-out when the result of prior selection changes the conditions under which alternatives can later be generated, expressed, heard, preserved, or reconsidered. The concern is therefore recursive closure of possibilities produced through selection across time.

Generative crowding-out can also arise through distributed patterns of repetition, without a single powerful actor. If many participants independently choose the most familiar vocabulary, platform, evidential form, or professional convention, their aggregated behavior can make that choice easier for subsequent participants and alternatives comparatively more costly. Coordination, network effects, cumulative investment, and learned expectations can generate this effect without monopolistic intention. This possibility becomes important in Section 8, where decentralized participation is examined as a potential source of newly emergent asymmetry in its own right.

The concept should also remain distinct from complete disappearance. A tradition, interpretation, or aesthetic sensibility can survive in memory, private practice, local communities, or archival form while possessing little capacity to affect the dominant formation in which relevant decisions occur. Conversely, a source can lose institutional influence and later regain it when a change in circumstances makes its neglected distinctions newly useful. Normative systems therefore can contain latent alternatives whose generative capacity varies across time. This is one reason why formation history and temporal development become important later in the paper: a static observation of the currently dominant grammar can conceal both the processes that produced its advantage and the alternative sources that remain available for reactivation.

Endogenous weighting also complicates the relation between normative authority and epistemic merit. A source can acquire authority because its contributions have repeatedly proved useful or well justified. Accumulated authority can then make later contributions easier to receive. This feedback can support epistemic learning. Yet the same structure can make current authority an imperfect proxy for current merit when past recognition itself shapes access to evidence, attention, publication, institutional memory, or standards of intelligibility. A mature analysis therefore requires separate questions about the quality of a contribution, the historical formation of its authority, and the effects of that authority on the continued visibility of alternatives.

A further threshold appears when favorable weighting extends into the categories through which competing contributions are recognized, classified, or dismissed. At that point the issue is no longer only how much influence a source receives, but how far it shapes the terms under which other sources can become intelligible at all. This is the point at which interpretive authority and the possibility of normative closure become analytically distinct from ordinary reweighting.

## 7 Interpretive Authority and Normative Closure

Endogenous weighting becomes especially consequential when prior influence begins to shape the terms through which later interpretations are recognized, classified, evaluated, or revised. This possibility requires a distinction between the ordinary concentration of interpretive authority and a more restrictive configuration in which one source, or a closely aligned set of sources, acquires substantial control over the conditions of intelligibility and participation. *Normative closure* names the latter possibility. The concept therefore concerns the continued accessibility of formative routes; authority, expertise, hierarchy, and coordinated decision remain compatible with openness under appropriate conditions.

The problem is adjacent to established analyses of language, credibility, and interpretive resources. Bourdieu emphasizes that linguistic exchange occurs within socially structured markets in which utterances draw unequal efficacy from the positions and resources of speakers [3]. Fricker's account of epistemic injustice, especially hermeneutical injustice, shows how unequal participation in shared interpretive resources can leave parts of social experience difficult to render intelligible [4]. Normative closure retains a narrower scope than either account. It isolates a second-order question that can arise with or without an established diagnosis of injustice: whether prior formative influence increasingly governs the conditions through which alternative sources can become intelligible and consequential in later rounds of formation.

Interpretive authority arises whenever an interpretation is granted a special standing within a relevant field of practice. The basis of that standing can vary. It can derive from demonstrated expertise, institutional office, accepted responsibility, accumulated trust, professional recognition, procedural role, historical prestige, or repeated success in resolving difficulties. A judge, teacher, editor, critic, senior researcher, standards body, or long-established text can therefore influence interpretation in ways that are unavailable to other participants. Such differences are compatible with the account of asymmetric generative capacity developed earlier. Their presence remains compatible with both open and closed interpretive configurations.

This distinction is important because some concentration of interpretive standing can support inquiry and coordination. Participants cannot ordinarily reconstruct every relevant distinction from the beginning each time a decision is required. Expertise permits inherited knowledge to remain usable; offices make responsibility assignable; precedents preserve continuity; disciplinary vocabularies reduce the cost of repeated clarification; and recognized forums can provide places in which disagreement becomes visible. An arrangement in which every interpretation had to acquire equal practical standing before any action could proceed would create its own exclusions through delay, opacity, and coordination failure. Interpretive authority can therefore have a constructive role without acquiring unrestricted control over normative formation.

A more demanding issue appears when authority extends from offering a comparatively influential interpretation to shaping the conditions under which interpretations are admitted as intelligible contributions. The difference can be illustrated by the relation between evaluating an answer and specifying the language in which an answer can count as responsive. In the first case, a source receives greater weight within a field of alternatives. In the second, the source begins to affect the boundaries of the field itself. It can help determine which categories are available, which distinctions appear relevant, which forms of evidence are recognizable, which questions can be posed in an accepted vocabulary, and which forms of experience require translation before they become institutionally visible. This second-order capacity is closer to *interpretive control* than to interpretive authority alone.

Interpretive control can operate without explicit prohibition. A contribution can remain formally permissible while becoming difficult to formulate in the recognized grammar of a field. An unfamiliar experience can be translated into categories that omit precisely the distinction its bearer regarded as important. A minority conceptual scheme can remain available in archives while losing the institutional settings in which it could be taught, refined, or applied. A professional vocabulary can become so closely

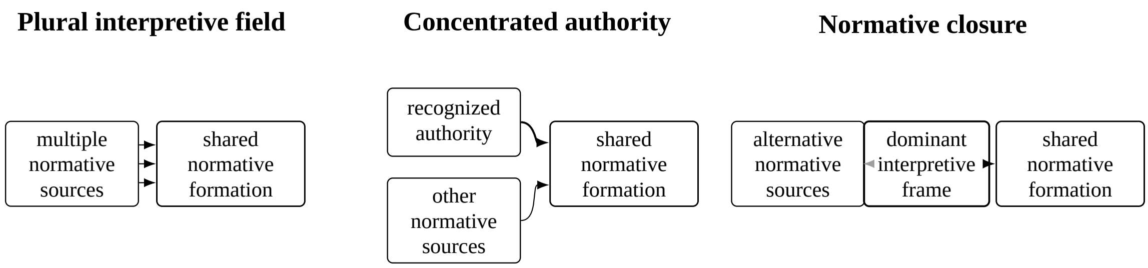


Figure 5: Analytical configurations of interpretive participation. Concentrated authority can coexist with multiple effective routes of contribution. Normative closure is approached when a dominant interpretive frame increasingly mediates whether alternative sources can become intelligible and consequential within the shared formation process. The configurations are comparative and need not form a temporal sequence.

associated with competence that alternative descriptions are received as evidence of incompetence before their substantive claims are considered. In such cases, the narrowing occurs partly through the conditions of intelligibility rather than through direct suppression.

The paper uses *normative closure* for configurations in which these conditions become sufficiently concentrated that relevant alternative sources face substantial and persistent difficulty participating in the continued formation, interpretation, or revision of the normative structure at issue. The notion is intentionally gradual. Closure can be partial, domain-specific, and reversible. A field can remain open to disagreement over outcomes while being comparatively closed with respect to the vocabulary in which disagreement is expressible. It can permit new evidence while preserving a narrow set of admissible evaluative categories. It can accept critical interpretations after a decision while offering few opportunities for those interpretations to shape the categories used before the decision. The relevant question is therefore which dimensions of participation remain genuinely available and which have become difficult to reopen.

Figure 5 presents three analytical configurations that help distinguish ordinary plurality, concentrated authority, and normative closure. The panels represent comparative configurations with no implied temporal sequence. They represent different relational arrangements that can coexist, reverse, or vary across domains. The middle configuration preserves multiple routes of participation while granting one source greater recognized standing. The right-hand configuration adds a gatekeeping relation in which the dominant interpretive frame increasingly mediates whether other sources can enter the shared formative space at all.

The distinction also clarifies why formal permission provides limited evidence about openness. A procedure can formally permit participation while imposing translation demands that only well-resourced actors can satisfy. An institution can invite criticism while defining relevance in a vocabulary produced by the very practice under criticism. A scholarly field can contain published alternatives while assigning them little curricular, editorial, or professional reproduction. Conversely, a formally hierarchical setting can remain comparatively open when authoritative interpretations are contestable, reasons for them are inspectable, alternative vocabularies can be introduced, and revisions can occur without extraordinary cost. Openness and closure therefore concern effective formative relations as well as formal rights of expression.

Normative closure also has a temporal dimension. An interpretation that initially acquires authority because it solves a real problem can become embedded in curricula, classifications, routines, interfaces, archives, and professional expectations. Later participants then encounter the interpretation less as one historically situated solution among alternatives and more as the background through which alternatives themselves are judged. The provenance of the dominant grammar becomes difficult to see. At this stage, closure can be maintained without deliberate enforcement because the material and conceptual environment already channels attention toward some distinctions and away from others. Historical success can therefore be converted into a durable advantage in later interpretive participation.

Inherited categories can embody accumulated learning and practical value even when they also organize later participation. Their persistence can reflect conceptual economy, or repeated confirmation. The analytical concern is that historical persistence and present justification are distinct questions. A category can remain well justified after long use, and an old category can remain influential after its original justification has weakened. When the conditions for questioning the category are themselves organized through that category, the difference becomes difficult to examine. Normative closure is therefore particularly relevant where the structure under evaluation also shapes the language and procedures by which evaluation is conducted.

A related difficulty arises from asymmetry in reflexive capacity. Sources with substantial interpretive authority can often describe their own practices in terms that are already recognized as relevant, reasonable, or professional. Less established sources may need first to translate their experience into that recognized vocabulary before their disagreement can be heard. Translation can be generative when it creates mutual intelligibility, but it can also remove features that motivated the disagreement. The burden of translation is itself a possible site of asymmetry. A field can therefore appear consensual partly because the forms of dissent most difficult to translate never become visible within the shared record.

For this reason, closure should not be identified solely through observed agreement. High agreement can arise from convergence after open inquiry, practical coordination, shared experience, coercion, exclusion, selective visibility, or long processes of mutual learning. The analysis does not infer the formation mechanism from agreement alone. Evidence relevant to closure would instead concern the availability of alternative vocabularies, access to interpretive forums, costs of contestation, possibilities of revision, patterns of translation, persistence of excluded sources, and the historical process through which authoritative categories acquired their position. These questions require empirical and interpretive work beyond the conceptual account offered here.

The relation between closure and power should likewise remain qualified. Interpretive closure can be supported by actors with concentrated institutional power, yet it can also emerge from decentralized repetition, technical standardization, professional convergence, network effects, or ordinary preferences for familiar categories. A powerful actor can sometimes reopen a closed formation by protecting dissent or introducing neglected sources, while a formally decentralized environment can produce strong closure through cumulative coordination. Power remains relevant insofar as it affects the capacity to shape, preserve, contest, or reopen the conditions of interpretation. It is therefore one possible mechanism within the broader relational account rather than a synonym for closure.

The evaluative implications should also be stated cautiously. Normative closure can create epistemic risks by reducing exposure to alternative evidence, interpretations, and experiences. It can create practical risks when a field loses the capacity to adapt to conditions that its inherited grammar does not represent well. It can raise normative concerns when persons affected by a formation possess little effective capacity to contest the categories through which their claims are assessed. Collective action often requires temporary closure: decisions sometimes need to be made, classifications applied, and procedures completed. The relevant issue therefore concerns the relation among closure, duration, justification, revisability, and the continued possibility of reopening formative conditions. Section 14 returns to these institutional questions after the paper has examined the temporal and evaluative dimensions of asymmetry.

A further complication now becomes unavoidable. One might respond to interpretive concentration by preferring decentralized or bottom-up formation, where no single source possesses comparable authority over the field. Such arrangements can widen participation and diversify the origins of normative contributions. The relational mechanisms through which asymmetry arises remain active within such arrangements. Repeated participation can generate expertise, visibility, trust, network centrality, infrastructural dependence, and new standards of legibility. Section 8 therefore examines how asymmetric generative capacity can re-emerge within decentralized formation itself, turning the problem from one of locating a single centre of power into one of understanding the trajectories through which differential formative capacity is continually produced.

## 8 Emergent Asymmetry in Decentralized Normative Formation

One response to interpretive closure is to disperse formative capacity across more participants and more sites of interpretation. Such decentralization can protect alternative routes of contribution and reduce dependence on a single centre, while leaving active the processes through which generative capacities differentiate. Repeated participation can produce expertise, trust, visibility, network centrality, coordination roles, infrastructural control, and other forms of accumulated advantage. The problem therefore shifts from locating a centre to understanding how asymmetric formative capacities emerge, become useful, and sometimes reproduce themselves within distributed relations.

Decentralized normative formation is used here in a modest sense. It describes arrangements in which the generation, interpretation, circulation, or revision of normative structures is distributed across multiple participants or sites, with no single source possessing exclusive control over the entire process. Decentralization is consequently a matter of degree and dimension. A field can be decentralized in the production of interpretations while remaining highly centralized in publication, certification, archiving, or enforcement. It can permit wide participation in discussion while relying on a small number of actors to maintain the infrastructure through which discussion occurs. It can also distribute practical experimentation while preserving a narrow vocabulary for recognizing which experiments count as relevant. The term therefore accommodates substantial internal differentiation.

Distributed participation can expand the range of experiences and judgments that enter a formative process. It can expose established categories to local knowledge, create multiple sites of experimentation, and lower the dependence of a field on one interpretive authority. These possibilities matter for the account of closure developed above. A formation with several independent routes of contribution can retain resources for criticism even when one route becomes temporarily dominant. Decentralization can also increase resilience by allowing alternative practices or vocabularies to survive outside the settings in which they presently receive the greatest recognition.

The same process, however, can generate new asymmetries. Participants who remain engaged over long periods accumulate familiarity with procedures, concepts, archives, and recurring difficulties. Their contributions can therefore become more useful to others, which can produce greater trust and more frequent consultation. Participants occupying connective positions can acquire an informational advantage because they encounter contributions from several parts of the network. Those who perform coordination, moderation, translation, maintenance, or record-keeping can influence which contributions remain visible and retrievable. Time availability, linguistic fluency, technical competence, material resources, and continuity of participation can similarly alter the capacity to contribute. None of these differences requires a prior central authority. They can arise through the ordinary operation of a distributed formation.

Such differences can be generative for the formation itself. Accumulated expertise can reduce repeated errors; trusted participants can coordinate work under uncertainty; maintainers can preserve shared infrastructures; and experienced interpreters can translate between vocabularies that would otherwise remain isolated. Emergent asymmetry by itself supplies no diagnosis of failure in a decentralized arrangement. The relevant issue is how the differentiation develops and what it does to later participation. An asymmetry that enables additional sources to become intelligible or effective has a different trajectory from one that progressively converts a coordinating role into control over admission, recognition, or revision.

Figure 6 represents this distinction without assuming that decentralized formations pass through a fixed sequence. The upper relation depicts multiple sources contributing through several routes. The lower relation identifies recurrent mechanisms through which participation itself can differentiate later formative capacities. The figure leaves the direction of the later consequences open: accumulated expertise, trust, centrality, coordination, and infrastructural roles can support wider participation, or under other relational conditions can make participation increasingly dependent on a smaller set of sources.

The emergence of differentiated capacity can become recursive. Greater visibility can increase the likelihood of future participation; frequent participation can generate familiarity and trust; trust can lead

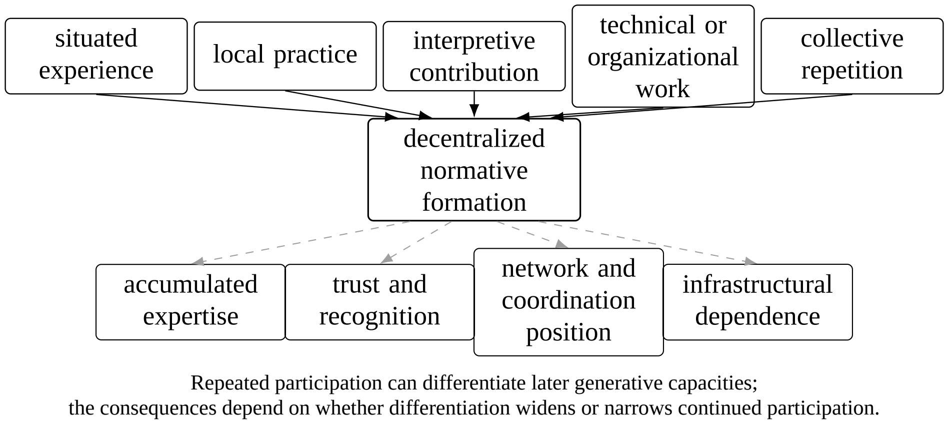


Figure 6: Emergent asymmetry within decentralized normative formation. Multiple sources can participate without a single formative centre, while repeated participation can generate differences in expertise, recognition, network position, coordination capacity, and infrastructural dependence. These differences are analytically compatible with both enabling and restrictive later trajectories.

to additional coordination responsibilities; and coordination can provide earlier access to information or greater influence over the organization of subsequent interaction. Similar processes can occur around infrastructures. A participant who maintains a shared archive, platform, vocabulary, or technical standard may initially acquire influence because maintenance is useful to the community. Later participants can become dependent on that infrastructure, giving its maintainer a formative capacity that was not present when the decentralized arrangement began. The asymmetry is therefore historically produced through the practice rather than simply imported from outside it.

Distributed repetition can generate a related form of asymmetry without any individual participant becoming dominant. When many participants repeatedly adopt the same classification, vocabulary, aesthetic convention, professional routine, or interpretive shortcut, the adopted form becomes easier for later participants to recognize and use. Alternative forms may then require more explanation, translation, or coordination even when no actor has prohibited them. Numerical prevalence can thereby acquire formative significance through expectation and compatibility. What is widely used becomes easier to use because others anticipate it; what is easier to use can become more widely used. This mechanism resembles the endogenous reweighting discussed in Section 6, but its source is distributed coordination rather than a single authoritative centre.

The distinction between equal permission and equal formative capacity is therefore especially important in decentralized settings. A community can give every participant the same formal right to speak while leaving substantial differences in time, knowledge, language, reputation, technical access, and ability to remain present across repeated interactions. It can make source code, archives, meetings, or deliberative spaces formally open while relying on tacit knowledge that newcomers acquire only through prolonged participation. Such conditions can arise through cumulative practice without intentional exclusion. Their cumulative effect can nevertheless create differentiated capacities to shape what the community continues to regard as intelligible, useful, or worth preserving.

This observation also complicates appeals to the "bottom up." Bottom-up formation can describe an important direction of participation, especially when normative resources emerge from local practice rather than being specified by a central authority. The direction from which a process begins leaves open the distribution of capacity that develops within it. Local participants can create informal leaders, canonical interpretations, central nodes, reputational hierarchies, and inherited routines. A practice that begins as an alternative to centralized authority can therefore acquire its own centres of coordination and its own burdens of entry. The continued openness of a formation depends partly on whether these emergent differences remain contestable, transmissible, revisable, and capable of generating new participants rather than only reproducing established ones.

A trajectory-sensitive perspective begins to appear at this point. Two formations can display similar asymmetry at a given moment while differing substantially in provenance and likely consequences. In one, experienced participants may use accumulated capacity to teach newcomers, document tacit knowledge, distribute responsibilities, and create additional sites of initiative. In another, the same apparent concentration may make access depend increasingly on personal recognition, inherited position, or control of a shared infrastructure. A static description of who presently has greater influence therefore leaves open an important question: whether the asymmetry is regenerating the formative capacities of the wider field or narrowing them. The later sections on normative trajectories and evaluation return directly to this distinction.

Centralization and decentralization therefore remain context-dependent institutional forms. A centralized arrangement can preserve openness by guaranteeing access, recording dissent, or protecting less established sources; a decentralized arrangement can develop strong closure through cumulative coordination and self-reinforcing recognition. The relevant object is the relational and temporal production of formative capacity; organizational forms require evaluation through their concrete operation.

Philosophical claim formation makes this temporal problem especially visible. A stabilized claim can conceal an argumentative provenance composed of inherited problems, conceptual distinctions, objections, revisions, and relations to earlier traditions. The generative capacities of these sources are rarely equal, and the role of a final proposition cannot always be reconstructed from its wording alone. Philosophy therefore provides a first case in which provenance and trajectory become part of the conditions of intelligibility; international law and aesthetics subsequently place the same vocabulary under different doctrinal and perceptual pressures.



## 9 Philosophical Claim Formation and Argumentative Provenance

Philosophical inquiry provides a first case in which the formation problem appears inside the life of claims themselves. A mature proposition can often be stated in a sentence, while that sentence preserves only a compressed trace of the problem history, conceptual distinctions, objections, revisions, and inherited vocabularies through which it became intelligible. The term *argumentative provenance* is used here for this historically and relationally structured trajectory of conceptual formation. The claim is limited: philosophical truth and validity remain matters of reasons, while historical provenance can contribute to adequate understanding when the meaning and role of a claim depend on the problem to which it responds and the sequence of distinctions through which that response was formed.

A philosophical claim can therefore be approached at more than one level. At a minimal level, a reader can recover the proposition expressed by a sentence and identify its explicit inferential relations to nearby premises. At a richer level, the reader can ask why the proposition was required, which inherited alternatives it addresses, which distinctions had to be introduced before it could be formulated, what objections redirected the inquiry, and what earlier meanings of its terms remain active within it. These questions concern more than historical context in the sense of surrounding events. They concern the internal history of an argument: the sequence of pressures through which a position was generated, opposed, narrowed, reformulated, and stabilized.

This distinction helps explain why philosophical learning frequently resists a purely definitional representation. A later reader can extract a concept into a compact entry—for example, a definition of freedom, reason, substance, recognition, or justice—and such an entry can be useful for orientation. The entry nevertheless records a stabilized surface, leaving open why that distinction became necessary, which rival formulations it displaced or absorbed, or which unresolved tensions remain encoded in its wording. The same point applies to arguments. A proposition may admit a concise reconstruction in premise–conclusion form while the philosophical significance of the conclusion depends on a longer process in which the available premises, the meaning of the terms, and even the formulation of the problem were repeatedly revised.

Kant's treatment of pure reason provides a particularly clear illustration. In the first-edition preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents reason as confronted by questions that arise from its own activity yet exceed its capacity when it moves beyond the conditions under which cognition can be secured. Metaphysics consequently appears as a field of persistent controversy requiring a critique of reason's own powers [5]. Modern scholarship accordingly treats the first Critique as the result of a long intellectual development rather than the presentation of an isolated insight [6].

Kant's later account of Hume's influence makes the formative trajectory especially visible. He describes Hume's challenge as having changed the direction of his investigations in speculative philosophy, while subsequent interpretation has examined how that challenge interacted with broader concerns about metaphysics and the antinomial conflicts of reason [7]. Against this problem history, "pure reason" is intelligible through more than a lexical definition. Its role emerges within a field concerning the powers and limits of reason, the status of metaphysical cognition, the relation between a priori conditions and experience, and the possibility of disciplined self-critique.

The example is analytically useful because the final vocabulary does not simply name objects that were already conceptually fixed. Distinctions among sensibility, understanding, and reason; between a priori and empirical cognition; and between legitimate and illegitimate uses of reason acquire their specific work within a developing architecture of problems. The meaning of a term is therefore partly relational: it depends on the neighboring distinctions that make a certain inferential role possible. A reader who memorizes an isolated definition can recover one stabilized description while missing the network of contrasts, motivations, and restrictions that give the description its philosophical force.

Argumentative provenance also includes internal opposition. Philosophical reasoning often develops through positions that are provisionally attractive and then encounter objections generated by their own implications. A proposed distinction can solve one difficulty while producing another; a response to an opponent can reveal an unexamined presupposition in the original formulation; a concept introduced for one task can require a narrower or broader scope once it interacts with the rest of the argument. The relevant trajectory is therefore rarely a simple accumulation of propositions. It can include reversals, qualifications, discarded formulations, recovered distinctions, and changes in what counts as the problem itself. The final claim condenses this history even when the published sentence no longer displays it.

This recursive character suggests an important difference between a claim's *content* and its *argumentative position*. Two sentences can express similar propositional content while occupying different places in an argumentative history. One can function as an inherited assumption, another as a conclusion reached after the failure of several alternatives, and a third as a provisional formulation whose limitations are openly retained. Their wording may converge while their epistemic roles differ. Provenance-sensitive reading therefore asks how a claim came to occupy its current position in a network of reasons, objections, and conceptual commitments. This inquiry supplements semantic reconstruction while preserving independent assessment of the claim's reasons.

The same point clarifies why the history of philosophy can be philosophically relevant rather than merely biographical. Historical inquiry can show which questions were available to an author, which vocabularies had already been stabilized, which scientific or theological developments altered the perceived problem space, and which interlocutors supplied objections or conceptual resources. Such information can reveal why a distinction that appears arbitrary when read in isolation became responsive within its original argumentative field. Historical reconstruction remains contestable, and later philosophical use can legitimately transform inherited concepts. The present claim is therefore limited to cases in which provenance materially changes what a reader can understand about the role, scope, or motivation of a philosophical position.

Philosophical formation also provides a case of asymmetric generative capacity. The sources entering an inquiry rarely possess equal formative influence. An established vocabulary can make some distinctions readily available while rendering others difficult to formulate. A canonical predecessor can supply concepts that structure later questions before alternative traditions are even considered. A successful scientific framework can alter what appears to require philosophical explanation. An objection associated with a highly respected interlocutor can receive sustained attention while a similar challenge from a marginal source remains less visible. A philosopher's own earlier commitments can acquire path-dependent force because later claims often need to remain intelligible within an already developed system. These asymmetries concern conditions of conceptual formation, while validity remains separately arguable. They identify unequal capacities among the sources that participate in its conceptual formation.

The asymmetry can become endogenous. Once a philosophical vocabulary has been used to organize a sufficiently large portion of an inquiry, later problems are more likely to be expressed through that vocabulary. Earlier distinctions then serve as conditions for recognizing new objections, and new objections are translated into the terms already available. This can be productive: cumulative conceptual work would be difficult if every problem required a new language. The same process can also narrow the field of intelligibility when alternative questions can enter only after translation into a dominant conceptual grammar. The philosophical case therefore mirrors the second-order mechanism developed in Section 6: a source that has already shaped a field can influence the conditions under which later sources become legible within it.

A mature philosophical system can consequently display both generativity and closure. Its conceptual distinctions may make previously obscure problems visible, permit more precise arguments, and connect questions that had appeared unrelated. The resulting grammar can later become restrictive when it sets the terms in which objections are expected to be stated and when challenges that do not fit those terms are treated as unintelligible, irrelevant, or insufficiently philosophical. Closure in this context remains graded. A stable vocabulary or canonical text can coexist with open criticism. The relevant question is whether alternative sources retain practical routes for changing the categories through which the field understands its own problems.

Argumentative provenance also gives the temporal dimension a distinctive importance. Suppose a philosophical claim is represented only by its final formulation at a time $t$. That representation may be sufficient for some tasks, such as identifying the proposition under discussion. It is often insufficient for reconstructing the claim's conceptual role. The reader may need to recover how earlier distinctions constrained later moves, which objections produced revision, and which alternatives were abandoned or retained. In this limited sense, the trajectory carries information that is absent from the snapshot. The point concerns intelligibility before it concerns evaluation: one may need to understand the route before deciding whether the destination is persuasive.

This observation also places a limit on retrospective formalization. A philosophical work can often be reconstructed into definitions, propositions, and inferential dependencies, and such reconstruction can expose ambiguity or logical gaps. Its usefulness is substantial when the philosophical task itself turns on explicit inference. The reconstruction nevertheless constitutes one representation of the work. If the process that generated a distinction changed the meaning or scope of the terms involved, a purely synchronic formalization can preserve the final dependencies while losing part of the conceptual movement through which those dependencies acquired their significance. The loss becomes especially important when the work repeatedly revises its own vocabulary in response to internal criticism.

The case therefore supports a restrained proposition about provenance. For some philosophical claims, the history of formation is partly constitutive of their *intelligibility* because it identifies the problem to which the claim responds, the conceptual alternatives against which it is articulated, and the sequence of revisions that fixes its scope. This proposition does not imply that historical origin determines truth, that an older interpretation has priority merely because it came first, or that later readers are confined to an author's original context. Argumentative provenance supplies information about what a claim is doing. Evaluation still requires reasons that can be examined beyond the circumstances of origin.

Philosophy consequently illuminates one part of the broader account of normative formation. A stabilized claim can conceal the heterogeneous and asymmetric sources that generated it; inherited conceptual grammars can enable inquiry while regulating what later inquiry can easily express; and a present intellectual position can carry a history whose reconstruction changes the quality of understanding available to a reader.

International law brings this concern into a domain with formal legal sources, institutional recognition, distributed practice, and explicit procedures of identification and application. The question of provenance therefore becomes more constrained: historical formation matters, yet its legal relevance is itself organized by doctrine.

## 10 Normative Formation in International Law

International law makes the relation among formation, identification, interpretation, and application unusually visible because its normative orders are connected to recognized legal sources, institutional procedures, interpretive conventions, authoritative decisions, and historically accumulated practice. As a doctrinally informed case, it also forces several distinctions that remain easy to blur in a general social theory. Legal sources differ from the broader generative sources used in this paper, and norm formation differs from norm identification. Practice can remain relevant after formal articulation, while legal rules determine the doctrinal significance of historical materials. The discussion therefore uses international law to refine the framework while preserving the autonomy of legal doctrine.

The classical doctrinal point of departure is Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice. In deciding disputes in accordance with international law, the Court is directed to apply international conventions, international custom, and general principles of law, while judicial decisions and qualified scholarly teachings serve as subsidiary means for determining rules of law [8]. The enumeration already complicates any simple picture of a single centralized act of rule production: international legal reasoning works with more than one doctrinal form through which rules are recognized and applied.

Article 38 supplies a legal taxonomy with a different analytical role from the taxonomy of *generative sources* developed in Section 3. A legal source is a doctrinal category within international law. A generative source, in the analytical vocabulary of this paper, is a historically situated practice, institution, interpretive resource, material infrastructure, or form of participation that contributes to the emergence, stabilization, visibility, interpretation, or revision of a normative structure. The categories can intersect without being identical.

Treaties make this distinction comparatively easy to see. Their legal form provides an explicit route through which a text is negotiated, adopted, authenticated, and connected to the consent of States to be bound. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties organizes these processes in detail, including rules concerning adoption and authentication of treaty texts and the various means through which consent to be bound may be expressed [9]. From the perspective of normative formation, this route gives some legal norms a comparatively visible moment of articulation. The treaty text can therefore look like a stable normative object whose formation has been completed once the relevant legal requirements are satisfied.

The same law of treaties also shows why this picture is incomplete. The Vienna Convention's general rule of interpretation directs attention to the terms of a treaty in their context and in light of the treaty's object and purpose. It also requires account to be taken, together with the context, of certain subsequent agreements and subsequent practice concerning interpretation, while its supplementary means of interpretation include preparatory work and the circumstances of conclusion in specified conditions [9]. The International Law Commission's later work on subsequent agreements and subsequent practice develops this temporal dimension expressly and treats such materials as means relevant to treaty interpretation [11]. Formal articulation can remain open to later relational development. A treaty can remain textually stable while its interpretive environment accumulates agreements, practice, institutional experience, and disputes concerning the significance of its terms.

This point should be stated with care. Subsequent practice is not a general permission to replace treaty text with whatever later conduct happens to occur, and historical development does not displace the doctrinal rules governing interpretation. The analytical significance is narrower. A norm that has a recognized textual source can still acquire part of its practically operative meaning through a trajectory in which later conduct and legal interpretation matter. Normative provenance in such a case is therefore layered. One layer concerns the formal act or sequence through which a treaty obligation acquired legal force for the relevant parties. Another concerns the interpretive history through which the text continues to be understood and applied. The layers interact while remaining legally distinguishable.

Customary international law makes the distributed character of formation even more visible. The International Law Commission's 2018 conclusions state the basic approach in terms of two constituent elements: a general practice and its acceptance as law, or *opinio juris*; they also distinguish practice accepted as law from mere usage or habit [10]. The analytical interest of this structure lies in the absence of a single moment corresponding to the enactment of a statute or the authentication of a treaty text. A customary rule may have to be reconstructed from a field of conduct, statements, legal positions, decisions, and other materials considered across actors and across time. What appears later as a comparatively compact rule can therefore depend upon an extended trajectory of practice and legal recognition.

The terminology adopted by the International Law Commission is itself useful for the distinction developed in this paper. The Commission's topic was initially framed as "formation and evidence of customary international law" and was retitled "identification of customary international law" during the work that led to the 2018 conclusions [10]. That terminological change is too narrow to establish a general theory of the difference between formation and identification. It nevertheless makes the analytical separation particularly salient. A process through which a customary norm comes into existence is not identical to a later legal inquiry into whether the required elements are present and whether a rule can be identified. Formation concerns the trajectory of normative emergence. Identification concerns the legally governed assessment through which an interpreter determines that a rule of customary international law exists. The two processes can overlap in practice, but collapsing them would obscure both.

This separation also helps clarify the place of asymmetry. Differences among States, institutions, courts, or other participants are not treated here as sufficient grounds to infer that the formal legal standing of their contributions is simply a function of social power. International law contains its own criteria for assessing relevant practice and legal materials, and those criteria constrain what can count in legal identification. The relational framework instead draws attention to a prior and more modest question: whether participants possess equal capacities to generate relevant practice, articulate legal positions, preserve documentary traces, circulate interpretations, sustain participation over time, and make their conduct legible to institutions that later identify or interpret norms. These capacities can differ even where formal legal categories do not assign one participant a general right to define the law for others.

Such differences matter because identification depends upon accessible materials. The Commission's conclusions on customary international law require an assessment of available practice and identify a non-exhaustive range of materials relevant to acceptance as law. These include official statements, legal opinions, diplomatic correspondence, national judicial decisions, treaty provisions, and conduct connected to international resolutions or conferences [10]. The legal significance of those materials is governed by doctrine; their production and visibility, however, also presuppose capacities for record-making, publication, translation, legal expertise, diplomatic participation, and institutional access. A trajectory-sensitive analysis can therefore ask how the field of available legal materials came to have its present shape without treating that history as a substitute for legal assessment.

The distinction between *capacity* and *realized normative influence* developed in Section 5 becomes especially useful here. A participant can possess substantial capacity to articulate a legal position while producing little influence if the position is not taken up within the relevant interpretive or institutional settings. Conversely, a practice can acquire wider significance when it becomes repeatedly cited, recorded, taught, institutionalized, or incorporated into later legal reasoning. The resulting influence is relational. It depends on the legal status of the material, the interpretive context, the responses of other participants, and the institutions through which legal questions are identified and decided.

International law also sharpens the distinction among formation, identification, interpretation, and application. Formation concerns the processes through which a normative rule or position emerges. Identification asks whether a rule with a claimed legal status can be established under the relevant doctrinal criteria. Interpretation concerns the meaning and scope of a recognized legal text or rule. Application concerns the use of that rule in a particular legal setting, including its relation to facts and to other legal norms. These processes are connected, and a judicial decision or institutional practice can participate in more than one of them. They remain analytically distinct because the authority to apply a rule in a particular dispute does not by itself imply unrestricted authority to determine the entire future formation of the underlying norm.

This distinction is relevant to interpretive authority. Courts and other legal institutions can occupy positions from which their interpretations have substantial practical and doctrinal consequences. Such authority can support coherence, settlement, and the cumulative development of legal reasoning. The framework developed in Sections 6 and 7 nevertheless asks a second-order question: whether repeated interpretive influence changes the conditions under which alternative legal arguments can later become visible, credible, or usable. A widely adopted interpretation can provide a shared grammar that enables later reasoning. It can also raise the translation burden for positions framed in a different conceptual vocabulary. Whether the resulting stabilization amounts to productive coordination, path dependence, or a more restrictive closure cannot be inferred from authority alone.

Historical accumulation is therefore more than decorative background in this case. For treaty interpretation, legally relevant history can include the circumstances of conclusion and, under the applicable rules, subsequent agreement and practice. For customary international law, the existence and content of a claimed rule may require an assessment of practice and its acceptance as law across a relevant field and period. In both settings, the present normative object is connected to a temporal record whose legal relevance is structured by doctrine rather than by historical interest alone. The case thus provides a stronger form of trajectory sensitivity than the purely biographical claim that every norm has a history. Some parts of the historical trajectory enter the legal work of identification or interpretation itself.

At the same time, provenance has limits. The fact that a practice has been repeated over a long period does not alone establish a customary rule; the Commission's conclusions require the distinct element of acceptance as law [10]. The fact that a treaty emerged from a particular negotiating history does not authorize an interpreter to disregard the rules of interpretation governing the treaty [9]. A trajectory-sensitive account must therefore preserve the difference between historical explanation and legal justification. The former can explain why a normative configuration became available or influential. The latter depends on the criteria through which international law recognizes, interprets, and applies its rules.

The international-law case consequently refines the broader framework in three ways. First, it shows why generative sources should not be conflated with legal sources: the social and institutional processes that contribute to normative formation extend beyond the doctrinal categories through which legal rules are recognized. Second, it makes the distinction between formation and identification explicit. Third, it demonstrates that even comparatively formal normative structures can retain a trajectory-sensitive dimension through practice, interpretation, and historical accumulation. These observations preserve the doctrinal specificity of international law while showing that relational and temporal analysis can disclose features of legal formation that remain obscured when the present formulation of a norm is treated as a self-sufficient snapshot.

Aesthetics changes the problem again. Philosophy and international law operate through extensively articulated languages of reasons, texts, and recognized distinctions, whereas aesthetic judgment can reach normative territory through a less fully articulated route. Perception, affective response, attention, learned sensibility, and historically formed categories may interact before the grounds of judgment are completely expressible. Aesthetic norm formation therefore asks how a partly pre-explicit formative structure can remain historical, relational, and open to asymmetric influence.

## 11 Aesthetic Norm Formation and Pre-Explicit Structure

Aesthetic judgment introduces a different pressure on the framework. A response can become normatively articulated as a judgment of beauty, refinement, vulgarity, balance, expressive success, or artistic importance while part of the responsiveness from which the judgment emerges remains only partly conceptualized. Perception, attention, affect, embodied orientation, familiarity, and learned sensibility can differentiate what appears salient before a person can fully state why the differentiation matters. The aesthetic case therefore asks how pre-explicit responsiveness and articulated normative judgment may develop recursively within histories of social recognition. Its role is narrower than a general theory of beauty and preserves aesthetic judgment as more than convention; it tests a framework that has so far operated mainly with more explicit forms of conceptual and institutional articulation.

A first difficulty concerns the status of aesthetic judgment itself. Kant's account remains useful because it makes visible a tension that is central to the present inquiry. Judgments of taste are grounded in feeling, yet they claim a form of universal validity that is not derived from a determinate concept or a rule capable of compelling agreement [12]. The philosophical importance of this structure can be retained without adopting Kant's full transcendental account. It shows that aesthetic judgment can occupy a normative space without behaving like the application of a fully specified criterion. The person who calls something beautiful commonly does more than report a private preference, while the grounds of the judgment may remain resistant to complete codification. Normative force and conceptual determinacy can therefore come apart.

Hume approaches the difficulty from a different direction. His discussion of taste begins from the diversity of judgments across persons, nations, and periods, yet it also resists the conclusion that criticism is therefore without standards. Practice, comparison, delicacy of sentiment, good sense, and freedom from prejudice figure in his account of the qualified critic [13]. The resulting view is historically instructive for the present paper because aesthetic competence is not represented as a fixed rule that precedes experience. It is cultivated through repeated encounter and comparison. Judgment is formed through a trajectory of exposure and exercise, and the authority of judgment is connected to that trajectory rather than to a formal procedure alone.

These two traditions already complicate a simple sequence in which an aesthetic norm first exists and individual judgments subsequently apply it. An alternative sequence in which an entirely unstructured response first occurs and a norm is later imposed is also too simple. The distinction between pre-explicit and explicit formation is therefore used here with caution. *Pre-explicit* here marks a level of responsiveness that may already be socially, historically, and bodily structured while remaining less than exhaustively articulated in the conceptual vocabulary through which a later judgment is defended or communicated. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology offers one influential vocabulary for describing perception as embodied, situated, and pre-reflective rather than as a sequence assembled from already explicit judgments [14]. The present paper adopts only the weaker analytical implication: some perceptual and affective differentiations can be operative before they are rendered into explicit normative propositions.

That weaker claim leaves the origin of those differentiations open. They may reflect bodily capacities, perceptual organization, material properties of an object, accumulated exposure, learned attention, cultural categories, prior instruction, or combinations of these and other conditions. A musical interval can be heard as tense or resolved before a listener can describe its harmonic structure. A visual arrangement can attract or repel attention before a viewer has a critical vocabulary for composition. A style can feel familiar, awkward, solemn, playful, or excessive before the relevant predicates are consciously selected. Such examples leave the response open to historical and individual variation. They show why normative formation in aesthetics cannot be adequately represented by explicit rules alone.

The reverse dependence is equally important. Once aesthetic categories become available, they can reorganize later perception. Learning to distinguish counterpoint, perspective, tonal color, brushwork, restraint, ornament, montage, or genre conventions can change what becomes noticeable in a later encounter. Critical vocabularies direct attention; canons create repeated exposure; institutions determine what is preserved, exhibited, performed, or taught; and participation in an artistic practice can make previously imperceptible differences salient. Articulated norm and experienced judgment can therefore participate in a recursive relation. A prior response contributes to the formation of a judgment, while the stabilized judgment helps structure the conditions of later response.

Figure 7 represents this proposal as a recursive configuration rather than a causal sequence. The figure leaves causal priority among perception, judgment, and institution open. It identifies three analytically distinguishable regions whose relations can change across cases: pre-explicit perceptual-affective differentiation; articulated aesthetic judgment and critical vocabulary; and social-institutional stabilization through education, criticism, canons, exhibition, performance, circulation, or other practices. Each

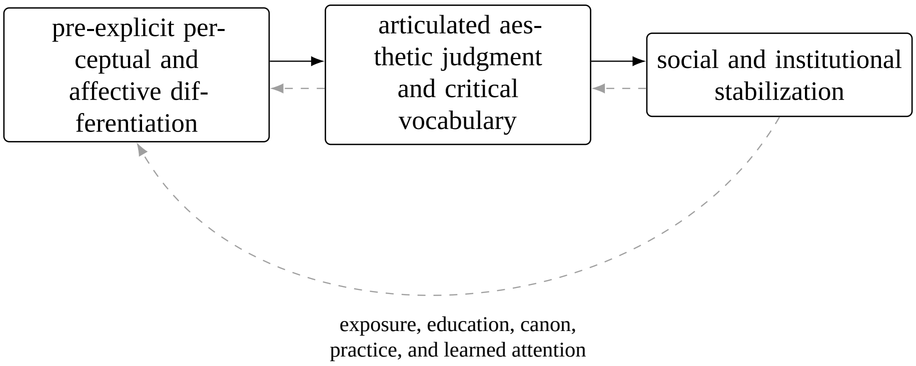


Figure 7: Aesthetic norm formation as recursive co-formation. Pre-explicit perceptual and affective differentiation can inform articulated judgment; articulated judgments can be stabilized through critical, educational, and institutional practices; and those stabilizations can reshape later exposure, attention, and perceptual competence. The diagram leaves causal priority among these regions open.

region can modify the conditions under which the others operate. The relation is therefore better understood as co-formation than as a single direction of determination.

This recursive structure also clarifies why aesthetic norms are historical without being reducible to historical convention. A canon, style, genre, or critical vocabulary can accumulate through repeated judgment and institutional selection. Later participants then encounter a field already structured by those accumulations. They inherit names for distinctions, examples of excellence and failure, techniques of attention, and expectations about what counts as a serious object of criticism. Yet inherited structures remain open to new perceptual encounters and new practices. A work can expose a limitation in an available vocabulary; a new medium can make an older distinction less useful; repeated encounters with previously marginalized forms can alter what a community notices and values. Historical formation therefore constrains and enables without mechanically determining later judgment.

Bourdieu's analysis of taste adds a further dimension by locating aesthetic classification within social relations. *Distinction* treats judgments of taste as connected to differences in social position, cultural competence, and classificatory practice, and it emphasizes that aesthetic choices can function within systems of social distinction [15]. Social position is treated as one formative condition among others, leaving the question of aesthetic value open. Bourdieu's work is relevant here because it shows why the formation and recognition of taste cannot always be understood by examining the isolated subject and object alone. Access to works, training in interpretive codes, familiarity with canonical forms, and the authority to name some practices as refined, serious, naive, vulgar, or avant-garde can be unevenly distributed. These differences can become part of the generative conditions of later judgment.

The problem of asymmetric generative capacity therefore appears in aesthetics with unusual clarity. Where a field possesses determinate rules for resolving a dispute, the influence of a speaker can in principle be constrained by the public application of those rules. Aesthetic disagreement often offers fewer such resources. This does not mean that reasons disappear: critics can point to form, technique, historical context, expressive success, internal coherence, innovation, fidelity to a practice, or consequences of interpretation. The relevant point is that such considerations frequently underdetermine a single compulsory conclusion. When explicit criteria cannot settle disagreement, capacities to secure attention, recognition, repetition, preservation, and circulation can acquire greater relative importance in stabilizing what a field comes to regard as exemplary.

This possibility should be distinguished from the stronger claim that power creates beauty at will. Material form, perceptual response, artistic practice, historical comparison, critical reasons, and the experiences of later participants remain possible sources of resistance. A highly promoted work can fail to sustain attention; an initially marginal practice can generate new forms of competence; a canon can be revised when inherited judgments cease to organize experience persuasively. Asymmetric capacity is therefore one source within a heterogeneous formation, not an unrestricted substitute for the other sources.

The stronger analytical issue concerns second-order influence. An institution, critic, market intermediary, school, platform, or canon can affect more than the relative visibility of already recognized options. Repeated selection can shape which works are available for comparison, which vocabularies are taught, which forms become familiar, and which differences later perceivers learn to notice. The resulting influence acts upon the conditions of future judgment. An initially contingent asymmetry in attention can thereby become a more durable asymmetry in aesthetic competence and intelligibility. The mechanism resembles the endogenous weighting discussed in Section 6: prior influence can alter the environment through which later influence is realized.

Aesthetic canon formation provides an especially clear illustration. Canonical status gives a work or style repeated opportunities for encounter. Repeated encounter supports scholarship, reproduction, pedagogy, technical imitation, and critical vocabulary. Those resources can make the canonical object easier to interpret at a high level of resolution, while less preserved or less taught objects require greater effort merely to become legible. The difference need not arise from deliberate exclusion. It can emerge from cumulative selection. Once established, however, it changes the comparative field within which later judgments are made. A canon can preserve difficult achievements and transmit standards of attention; it can also narrow the range of materials through which future aesthetic competence is formed. The same structure can therefore be generative and restrictive in different respects.

This is also why aesthetic expertise should not be collapsed into domination. Hume's emphasis on practice and comparison already suggests that trained judgment can embody real epistemic work [13]. A listener who has heard many performances, a conservator who understands materials, or a critic familiar with a genre's history can perceive distinctions unavailable to a novice. Such asymmetry can enlarge the normative field when expertise is used to teach, translate, preserve, and expose others to richer comparisons. It becomes more restrictive when the same position controls the terms under which alternative experience can become recognizable at all. The normative question therefore concerns the trajectory and use of expertise, rather than the mere fact that expertise is unequally distributed.

The relation between aesthetic response and aesthetic norm can now be stated more precisely. The analysis leaves the temporal priority of judgment and norm open and treats their relation as potentially recursive. It proposes a co-formative possibility. Prior norms shape attention and interpretive competence; encounters generate responses that may reinforce, modify, or resist those norms; articulated judgments enter criticism, education, institutions, and collective practice; and those stabilized forms reshape later encounters. The relative contribution of each process can vary across media, periods, communities, and individuals. The proposal is therefore a framework for inquiry rather than a universal psychological sequence.

The aesthetic case refines the broader argument in three ways. First, it shows why normative formation can involve structures that are only partly explicit at the moment they influence judgment. Second, it demonstrates a recursive relation in which stabilized norms can reorganize the perceptual and interpretive capacities through which later norms are generated. Third, it shows why asymmetric generative capacity may become especially consequential where explicit criteria leave substantial room for contestable judgment. None of these points makes aesthetic norm formation arbitrary. Together they show why a static inventory of accepted judgments can conceal the perceptual, historical, and institutional trajectory through which those judgments became available and authoritative.

The aesthetic case also widens the meaning of formation history. A trajectory can include changes in cultivated attention, embodied competence, critical vocabulary, material preservation, and institutional visibility, even where no single explicit rule records those changes. Historical sequence therefore matters here through the capacities it leaves available for later perception and judgment. This temporal residue provides the final element needed to treat historical accumulation and normative trajectories at a more general level.

## 12 Historical Accumulation and Normative Trajectories

Taken together, the three cases expose a temporal problem. Philosophical claims can depend for their intelligibility on problem histories and argumentative revision; international legal norms can be identified or interpreted through legally relevant histories of practice; aesthetic judgments can become available through accumulated habits of attention, criticism, pedagogy, and canon formation. In each domain, present articulation carries relations formed earlier. The question now is how to distinguish ordinary historical background from cases in which formation history remains analytically relevant to present meaning, standing, or future participation. The concepts of *historical accumulation* and *normative trajectory* are developed for this purpose, while keeping origin distinct from validity and allowing more than one formation history to contribute to a norm. Figure 8 previews the basic distinction.

History can matter to a normative object in several ways. At the weakest level, it supplies context: knowledge of a period, institution, or vocabulary can clarify why a norm or claim appeared without becoming part of its present content. History can also supply causal explanation, as earlier events, practices, conflicts, and material conditions help explain why one normative configuration emerged while another did not.

A stronger relation appears when formation history contributes to what can presently be understood, identified, or evaluated about the object itself. The argumentative provenance of a philosophical distinction, the legally relevant practice through which a customary rule is identified, and the accumulated comparisons through which an aesthetic canon becomes perceptually intelligible illustrate different versions of this relation. Such cases are described here as *trajectory-sensitive*; the kind and degree of historical relevance remain domain-specific.

A *normative trajectory*, in the present discussion, is the temporally structured pattern through which a normative formation emerges, is articulated, contested, stabilized, transmitted, revised, displaced, or reopened. A normative trajectory can be discontinuous, multi-scalar, and distributed across several actors or sources. Its events may overlap, occur on different timescales, or stand in only partial relations of temporal and institutional dependence. The concept therefore serves as a way of retaining ordered historical information that is lost when a normative formation is represented only by its current state. It is a representation of formation history that leaves social development open-ended.

The difference between a state description and a trajectory description is analytically important even when two present states appear similar. Two communities can articulate the same rule, employ the same evaluative phrase, or endorse the same formal principle at a given time while having reached that position through different processes. One may have arrived there through extended disagreement, translation across competing vocabularies, revision in response to affected participants, and institutional compromise. Another may have arrived at the same wording through a narrow interpretive channel in which alternative sources had little effective capacity to enter formation. A static inventory can record the same present articulation in both cases while leaving the different distributions of interpretive competence, expectation, trust, institutional memory, or future revisability that the two histories may have produced.

Figure 8 illustrates this point. The figure remains analytically neutral between the two developmental paths. It shows that a shared present articulation can coexist with different formative histories and therefore with different conditions of subsequent participation. The present state is a temporal cross-section whose description omits part of the formation history that made it possible.

Historical accumulation provides the mechanism through which these differences can persist. A consequence of earlier formation can become a resource or constraint for later formation. Repeated interpretation produces vocabularies; repeated adjudication or organizational decision produces precedents and expectations; repeated teaching produces competence; repeated preservation produces archives and canons; repeated reliance on an infrastructure produces technical dependence; repeated exclusion can leave absences in the materials available for later comparison. None of these accumulations is intrinsically beneficial or harmful. Their analytical significance lies in the conversion of past consequences into present formative conditions.

This conversion is especially important under asymmetric generative capacity. An early advantage

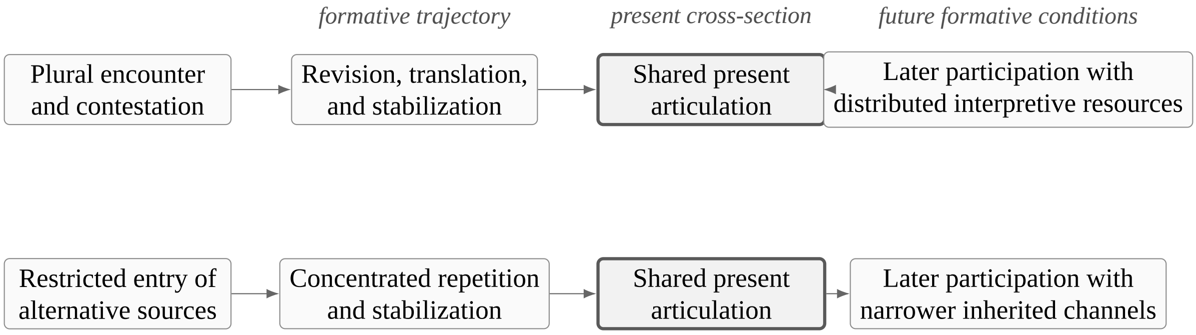


Figure 8: Different formative trajectories can reach a similar present articulation while leaving different conditions for later normative participation. The diagram is analytically neutral with respect to normative ranking and represents historical information omitted by a present-state description alone.

in visibility, institutional access, expertise, or coordination can produce a larger archive, a more familiar vocabulary, denser networks of recognition, or greater infrastructural centrality. Those products can then increase the ease with which the same source, or sources aligned with it, participate in later formation. The process can also operate in the other direction. A source with substantial capacity at one stage can use that capacity to translate alternatives, build shared competence, distribute tools, or create procedures through which later participants acquire greater formative independence. Historical accumulation therefore concerns the reproduction and transformation of capacity, including effects that outlast the decisions from which they emerged.

The distinction matters because persistence can be produced by different mechanisms. A norm can persist because participants repeatedly find its reasons persuasive. It can persist because alternatives have become costly to express, because the relevant vocabulary has disappeared, because institutional memory favors one interpretation, because coordination benefits make revision unattractive, or because later participants inherit an environment in which other possibilities are difficult to perceive. These mechanisms can coexist. Observed stability alone does not identify which mechanism is operating. The same caution applies to change: rapid revision can reflect successful learning, loss of institutional memory, strategic adaptation, coercive replacement, or a change in the participants capable of entering the formation process.

Attention to temporal development therefore adds information about *how* persistence and change occur. Relevant information can include the formation history of influential sources and the sequence through which their influence stabilized. It can also include the availability of effective contestation, the costs of revision, the survival of alternative vocabularies, the distribution of interpretive competence, and the effects of earlier decisions on later formative capacities. These dimensions need not be combined into a single metric. Their role is diagnostic: they help distinguish configurations that would otherwise look similar when viewed only at a present cross-section.

Across the three cases, this diagnostic role takes different forms. In philosophy, reconstructing a problem history can reveal why a distinction was introduced, which alternatives it displaced, and what later claims depend upon it. The resulting provenance can be important to interpretation while remaining separate from the truth of the philosophical claim. In international law, historically ordered practice can have a more formal role because the identification or interpretation of some legal norms requires attention to practice, acceptance, agreement, or legally relevant subsequent conduct. In aesthetics, accumulated exposure and canon formation can alter the perceptual and interpretive competence through which later judgments become available. The domains therefore differ in the status of historical information, even though each shows why a present articulation can conceal formative history.

This comparison also limits the scope of the argument. Historical provenance is not uniformly constitutive of validity. A proposition can survive the circumstances of its discovery; a legal rule can be applied through criteria that restrict the relevance of broader historical narratives; an aesthetic work can elicit responses that exceed the canon through which it was first received. The resulting account resists both temporal amnesia and historical reduction. Some questions can be answered adequately from a current state; others require formation history; still others require only particular segments of that history. Trajectory sensitivity is consequently a question-dependent analytical requirement rather than a universal demand for complete genealogy.

A further implication concerns the location of normative change. If accumulated formation becomes part of the environment of later participants, revision need not begin with an explicit rejection of a rule. Change can occur through a new vocabulary, a different archive, altered patterns of attention, revised professional training, expanded access to interpretive tools, or new forms of participation that gradually change which considerations can enter judgment. Conversely, a formally revised rule can leave much of its inherited formative environment intact. The history of a normative formation therefore includes changes in the conditions of interpretation and participation as well as changes in articulated content.

The concept of trajectory also clarifies why reversibility is more complex than formal repeal. A decision can be legally or institutionally reversible while its accumulated consequences remain difficult to undo. Skills may have been lost, alternative institutions may have disappeared, participants may have adapted their expectations, and infrastructures may have been rebuilt around the earlier settlement. The reverse can also occur: a formally stable rule may be surrounded by rich alternative practices and interpretive resources that make future revision relatively easy. Effective revisability is therefore a property of the wider formative environment as much as of the rule's explicit amendment procedure.

Historical accumulation therefore changes the question posed by asymmetric generative capacity. Persistence is only one possibility. Earlier asymmetries can generate competence, transmit memory, suppress alternatives, create new dependencies, or preserve resources that later make revision possible. A trajectory can be described in these terms without yet being endorsed or condemned. The evaluative problem begins when we ask which of these inherited features should matter to judgments about a present normative formation.

## 13 Trajectory-Sensitive Normative Evaluation

Once a normative trajectory is reconstructed, a further question arises: which features of that history matter to evaluation? Similar present articulations can inherit different distributions of competence, dependence, memory, authority, and possibilities of revision. A trajectory-sensitive evaluation therefore asks whether a present assessment is informationally incomplete when it attends only to current positions, resources, or formal permissions while omitting the formation and reproduction of effective normative capacity. The proposal remains limited. Asymmetry alone supplies insufficient evidence of injustice, and no general metric is offered for ranking historical trajectories.

This point can be situated beside a broader problem concerning the *informational basis* of normative evaluation. Sen's capability approach, for example, argues that the evaluation of social arrangements can require attention to what persons are substantively able to do and to be, rather than to resources alone [16]. The present inquiry addresses a different object, yet it adopts a related methodological caution. A formal right to speak, an equal allocation of procedural time, or an identical rule of access does not by itself establish equal capacity to contribute to normative formation. Participants may differ in interpretive competence, recognition, visibility, linguistic resources, institutional memory, or the ability to make their contributions persist. A trajectory-sensitive account therefore asks how those capacities came to be distributed and how current arrangements are likely to alter them further.

The first evaluatively relevant feature is *provenance*. Earlier sections used provenance primarily as an interpretive concept: a philosophical claim, legal norm, or aesthetic vocabulary can become more intelligible when its formation history is reconstructed. Provenance may also carry normative information. A rule stabilized through reciprocal adjustment among affected participants and a formally identical rule stabilized through exclusion can leave different relations of standing, trust, competence, and dependence. That difference does not mean that origin mechanically determines present validity. A norm with a troubling history can acquire independent justification and become embedded in more inclusive practices; a norm with an admirable origin can later be used in restrictive ways. Provenance matters when the conditions of formation remain connected to present capacities, burdens, or opportunities for revision.

A second feature concerns the *use of asymmetry*. Unequal generative capacity can perform constructive work. A teacher may initially possess greater conceptual and interpretive capacity than a student; a specialist may have a larger role in judgments that depend upon highly developed competence; a coordinator may temporarily concentrate organizational discretion in order to make collective action possible. The relevant normative question is therefore not simply whether one source has greater capacity than another. It includes what the asymmetry enables, which burdens accompany it, and what happens to the capacities of the other participants through its exercise. An asymmetry that supports translation, learning, access to tools, and increasing independence has a different trajectory from one that produces durable dependence on the same interpretive centre.

This difference can be expressed in terms of *capacity effects*. A use of generative capacity can expand the range of later participants able to understand, contest, revise, or create normative structures. It can also narrow that range by making alternative vocabularies less available, concentrating institutional memory, or increasing the costs of departure from an established interpretation. Expansion has no general priority over stabilization in this account. Stable standards can preserve knowledge, reduce coordination costs, protect vulnerable participants from arbitrary treatment, and make cumulative inquiry possible. The evaluative issue arises when the benefits of stabilization are considered together with the distribution of the capacity to question and revise what has been stabilized.

A third feature is *revisability*. Section 12 argued that formal reversibility and effective reversibility can diverge. That distinction has normative consequences. A rule may contain an amendment procedure while the practical capacities required to use it have eroded. An institution may permit dissent while relevant alternatives are no longer legible within its dominant vocabulary. Conversely, a stable formal rule can coexist with dense practices of criticism, preserved archives, independent expertise, and alternative institutions that make revision realistically available. Trajectory-sensitive evaluation therefore treats revisability as a property of the wider formative environment, including whether participants retain the resources needed to reopen settled questions.

The fourth feature concerns *self-reinforcement*. Earlier sections called attention to endogenous weighting: realized influence can reshape the conditions through which later influence is realized. Once this process becomes cumulative, present asymmetry may be partly a product of earlier asymmetry and may itself produce still greater asymmetry. This recursive pattern is normatively significant even when no single act of exclusion is decisive. It can gradually convert contingent differences in visibility, expertise, or institutional access into durable differences in standing and formative capacity. Republican accounts of domination provide an adjacent, though not identical, concern. Pettit emphasizes that domination can exist through a capacity for arbitrary interference even when interference is not presently exercised [17]. The same concern motivates asking whether concentrated formative capacity changes the effective freedom of others to participate, contest, or revise, while retaining a narrower focus on normative formation rather than adopting non-domination as a complete political ideal.

The evaluative relevance of self-reinforcement depends partly on whether alternative paths remain viable. A highly influential source can coexist with meaningful alternatives when other participants preserve independent access to knowledge, institutions, audiences, and interpretive tools. Concentration is more consequential when these alternative paths are progressively absorbed, depreciated, or rendered unintelligible. The evaluative concern lies in the relation among concentration, dependence, contestability, and the future availability of distinct sources of formation. This relation also explains why a decentralized arrangement can become normatively problematic without ever acquiring a single commanding centre: collective repetition can produce path dependence and crowding-out through the accumulated choices of many participants.

A fifth feature concerns the circulation and return of generative capacity. Eglash's account of generative justice emphasizes the ability of value generators to participate in the benefits of what they generate, to shape their conditions of production, and to sustain forms of value circulation that avoid extractive dependence [18]. More recent work in that tradition similarly stresses the restoration of conditions in which communities can control and regenerate value-producing processes [19].

The object here is different: the concern is participation in the formation of norms, interpretations, and evaluative structures. The comparison nevertheless suggests a related question. When an asymmetric normative relation produces knowledge, standards, classifications, or institutional order, do the benefits of that formation enlarge the future generative capacities of those whose experience, labour, practice, or compliance helped sustain it? The expression *generative return* is used provisionally for this question and remains one evaluative consideration among several.

Generative return can take multiple forms. An expert body can make its methods teachable rather than merely authoritative. A legal institution can preserve reasons, dissenting positions, and procedural memory in forms that remain accessible to later interpreters. An educational relation can convert initial dependence into increasing intellectual independence. An aesthetic institution can use its visibility to widen the repertoire through which new works become perceptible rather than treating an inherited canon as exhaustive. These examples share a temporal structure: capacity exercised at one stage helps create additional capacity at a later stage. A contrasting developmental path concentrates the outputs of earlier participation in a narrower set of sources than those that contributed to their formation.

The interaction of these features gives trajectory-sensitive evaluation a plural structure that exceeds any simple preference for equality or decentralization. A temporary asymmetry can be compatible with, and sometimes supportive of, broader future participation. A formally decentralized process can reproduce strong dependence. An inherited institution can preserve valuable competence while narrowing the vocabulary through which alternatives are expressed. A radical opening of participation can widen access while weakening capacities for continuity, memory, or technically demanding judgment. The relevant normative assessment is therefore plural: it concerns the kinds of capacities at stake, the purposes served by their differentiation, the mechanisms through which influence is reproduced, the availability of contestation, and the consequences for later formation.

This plural structure also resists compression into a single score. The features identified here can conflict. A formation may be highly revisable yet poor at preserving accumulated knowledge; broadly participatory yet dependent on a small technical infrastructure; rich in alternative vocabularies yet weak in the coordination needed for common action. Normative judgment therefore requires reasons for assigning significance to particular dimensions in a particular domain. The paper's contribution at this stage is diagnostic rather than aggregative. It proposes that present asymmetry should be interpreted alongside information about provenance, capacity effects, self-reinforcement, revisability, contestability, and the reproduction or circulation of future generative capacity.

The differences among the three cases require domain-specific interpretation of these dimensions. In philosophy, provenance-sensitive evaluation can concern whether a conceptual tradition preserves the arguments and alternatives needed for later criticism, while the truth of a proposition remains a separate question. In international law, legally relevant histories of practice and interpretation interact with formal doctrines that constrain which historical materials can establish or interpret a rule. In aesthetics, institutions that stabilize expertise and canon can deepen perceptual competence while also shaping which forms become visible or intelligible. Each domain therefore requires its own account of what counts as a relevant formative capacity and what kinds of asymmetry are justified by the activity at issue.

Trajectory-sensitive normative evaluation is consequently best understood as an additional layer of inquiry. It asks how present arrangements were formed, what capacities their operation reproduces, how readily their formative conditions can be contested or revised, and what possibilities they leave to later participants. These questions remain supplementary to a theory of justice and identify information that may matter when a present configuration conceals the relations that produced and sustain it. Once those dimensions become visible, the institutional question is how coordination and settlement can coexist with continued opportunities for learning, contestation, re-entry, and revision.

## 14 Institutional Conditions for Continued Normative Generation

Trajectory-sensitive evaluation leads to an institutional question: under what conditions can a normative formation remain capable of continued generation while collective practices still secure the stabilization, coordination, expertise, and decision they often require? The discussion here is narrower than a general theory of institutional design. Institutions are treated as parts of the formative environment because they distribute access, preserve memory, authorize decisions, organize attention, transmit competence, and shape the practical conditions under which settled norms can later be interpreted, contested, inherited, or revised.

This inquiry begins from a tension already visible throughout the paper. Normative formation also operates under practical requirements for settlement. A legal institution often needs to decide a case; a scientific or professional body may need a working standard; an educational setting ordinarily relies on a working set of concepts; an aesthetic institution needs to make choices about exhibition, collection, teaching, and preservation. Coordination frequently requires some stabilization of meaning and some temporary concentration of interpretive or decisional authority. At the same time, stabilization can become a source of endogenous reweighting when the capacities that produced a settlement also gain increasing control over the conditions of later participation. The institutional problem is therefore neither permanent openness nor permanent closure. It concerns the terms under which closure occurs and the conditions under which a settled formation can remain revisable.

A useful distinction is between *decisional closure* and *normative closure*. Decisional closure occurs when an institution brings a particular question to a sufficiently determinate settlement for action to proceed. A court issues a judgment, a committee adopts a rule, an editorial body makes a selection, or a community adopts a working convention. Normative closure, as used in Section 7, concerns a more extensive restriction on the continued participation of alternative sources in the formation, interpretation, or revision of the relevant normative structure. The first can be compatible with the continued availability of reasons, dissent, alternatives, and revision. The second narrows those possibilities. The difference makes it possible to value institutional settlement without treating every settlement as a final definition of the normative field in which it operates.

This distinction also clarifies why openness should not be reduced to the absence of authority. Institutions can remain open while assigning particular roles greater authority for particular purposes. A court can have authority to resolve a dispute while its reasoning remains subject to criticism and later interpretation. A teacher can exercise interpretive leadership while making the sources and argumentative moves of that interpretation available to students. A professional standard can guide practice while preserving procedures through which anomalies and alternative methods enter later revision. In these cases, authority is bounded by object, purpose, time, procedure, or the continued availability of other formative sources. The institutional question concerns how such boundaries are maintained in practice as well as how they are stated formally.

One condition for continued normative generation is therefore the preservation of *multiple routes of formative entry*. Formal permission to contribute is one route, but it is rarely sufficient by itself. Participants may also need access to relevant information, concepts, audiences, procedures, and material infrastructures. A system can declare itself open while requiring forms of expression, credentials, resources, or translation that only a narrow set of participants can reliably supply. Preserving formative entry consequently includes attention to the practical means through which heterogeneous experience becomes legible to a shared process. This need not imply equal weight for every contribution. It requires that potentially relevant sources retain some practicable way to become available for consideration.

A second condition concerns *preserved competence*. Continued generation depends on both the freedom to reopen questions and the capacities needed to do so well. Institutions that rely on specialized judgment can become fragile if the relevant competence is concentrated in a source that cannot be reproduced, taught, criticized, or replaced. Conversely, attempts to disperse a general dispersal of authority that fails to preserve demanding forms of expertise can reduce the quality of later revision. The institutional task is therefore partly one of transmission. Methods, reasons, archives, techniques, and interpretive skills can be organized so that present asymmetries of competence contribute to the formation of additional competence rather than becoming permanently indispensable dependencies. This is one institutional expression of the *generative return* discussed in Section 13.

Preserved competence also gives institutional memory a normative significance. A community that

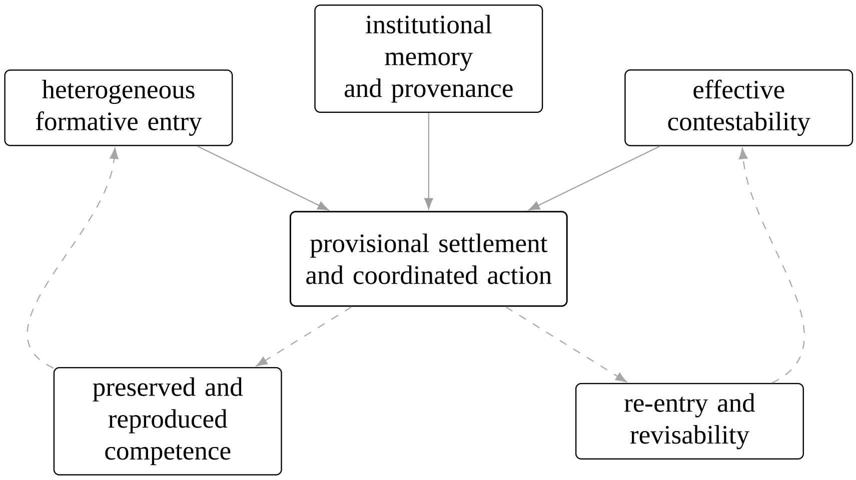


Figure 9: Institutional conditions surrounding provisional normative settlement. The diagram represents continued normative generation as an ecology in which coordinated action can be stabilized while heterogeneous formative entry, institutional memory, competence, contestability, and routes of re-entry remain available. Dashed relations indicate capacities whose preservation can affect later rounds of formation. The figure is analytical, with institutional design remaining domain-specific.

can revisit a settlement only by reconstructing its entire problem history from the beginning has a weaker practical capacity for revision than one that preserves reasons, objections, alternatives, and records of prior change. Memory is therefore more than administrative storage. It can conserve some of the argumentative and experiential provenance through which later participants understand why a normative structure acquired its present form. Archives, reasons for decisions, dissenting opinions, records of failed alternatives, and histories of modification can all contribute to this capacity. Their relevance varies by domain, and preservation itself can become selective or exclusionary, but the absence of accessible memory can make formal revisability increasingly nominal.

A third condition is *contestability*. Contestability is stronger than the mere permission to disagree. It concerns whether criticism can reach the processes that maintain a normative settlement and whether those processes can respond to reasons, evidence, experience, or alternative formulations that challenge it. An institution can tolerate dissent while insulating its classificatory scheme, agenda, or decision criteria from meaningful contact with dissenting sources. Effective contestability therefore depends partly on where criticism can enter. It may concern the interpretation of a rule, the categories through which cases are described, the evidence considered relevant, the composition of an expert body, or the procedure by which a question can be reopened. Different institutions will require different configurations, but the general issue is whether criticism remains capable of altering formative conditions rather than existing only alongside them.

Contestability is closely related to *re-entry*. Normative formation often excludes or postpones some alternatives simply because action requires selection. Continued generation requires a way for an excluded source, a new experience, or a previously unintelligible claim to become relevant later. Re-entry can occur through appeal, periodic reconsideration, reinterpretation, new evidence, changes in membership, alternative institutions, shifts in practice, or the emergence of a new vocabulary. None of these mechanisms is universally appropriate. Their common feature is temporal: a source that lacks sufficient influence at one stage is not thereby deprived of every future path into the formation process. This temporal possibility distinguishes provisional settlement from a stronger closure of the field.

Figure 9 represents these conditions as an institutional ecology surrounding a provisional settlement. The figure is not a sequence of procedural stages. It is intended to show that coordinated action can occupy a relatively stable centre while capacities for memory, contestability, re-entry, competence, and heterogeneous access remain present around it. The relative importance and institutional form of each condition are expected to vary across domains.

A fourth condition concerns the scope and duration of concentrated authority. Where a role has unusually strong capacity to define, interpret, or stabilize a norm, its boundaries matter for the trajectory of the surrounding field. Boundaries can be substantive, procedural, temporal, or jurisdictional. An expert body may possess authority over a technical question without acquiring exclusive authority over the values to which the technical judgment is put. A temporary coordinating role can expire or rotate. A decision can bind a present action while remaining open to later reconsideration under specified conditions. These arrangements do not eliminate asymmetry; they shape the ways in which asymmetry can persist, expand, or become contestable.

The stronger and more durable a closure becomes, the more important the institutional conditions of review may become. This is best treated as a heuristic whose application remains domain-specific. Some domains require stable settlements precisely because constant reopening would destroy the good that the institution exists to secure. Other domains can tolerate extensive experimentation. The relevant question is whether the costs and benefits of stability are considered together with the possibility that prolonged closure changes who remains capable of understanding, challenging, or replacing the settlement. A rule can become difficult to revise because amendment is formally demanding, because alternative expertise, vocabulary, or institutional memory has disappeared during the period of stability, or through a combination of these conditions.

A fifth condition is the preservation of *alternative formative sites*. If every relevant form of expertise, memory, publication, education, review, or recognition is concentrated within the same institutional centre, formal appeal may offer little practical independence. Alternative sites can provide redundancy, comparison, experimentation, and repositories of interpretations that would otherwise disappear. Their value does not depend on romanticizing fragmentation. Excessive institutional fragmentation can weaken common standards, obscure responsibility, and make coordinated action difficult. The relevant contribution of plurality is that some formative capacities can remain outside the immediate reproduction of a dominant settlement and can later serve as sources of criticism or renewal.

This point also clarifies why decentralization and continued generation should remain conceptually distinct. Section 8 showed that decentralized formation can itself generate concentrated expertise, visibility, or infrastructural dependence. An institution can therefore be formally decentralized while remaining normatively closed, just as a formally centralized institution can preserve meaningful routes of contestation, alternative expertise, and revision. Institutional evaluation should attend to the effective distribution and reproduction of formative capacities rather than infer openness directly from organizational form.

Revisiting the three cases makes the domain sensitivity of these conditions clearer. In philosophy, continued generation can depend on the preservation of arguments, objections, texts, conceptual alternatives, and interpretive practices through which later readers reconstruct a claim's provenance. A philosophical canon can transmit difficult achievements while remaining open to rereading, comparison, and the recovery of marginalized alternatives. In international law, the relevant institutional conditions are partly shaped by doctrines concerning sources, interpretation, legal authority, and procedure; historical materials matter through legally structured routes with bounded forms of participation appeal to provenance. In aesthetics, preserved competence can include techniques of attention, craft knowledge, archives, performance traditions, and critical vocabularies, while continued generation may also require exposure to forms that an inherited canon does not readily render legible. The institutional meaning of openness therefore differs across the three domains even when the underlying question of continued formative capacity recurs.

These differences caution against deriving a single institutional template from the framework. The proposal is better expressed through a family of design questions. Does a settlement preserve the reasons and capacities needed for later reconsideration? Can alternative sources become intelligible without first accepting every category of the dominant interpretation? Are forms of expertise reproducible beyond their current holders? Can criticism reach the conditions that organize recognition as well as the content of disagreement within them? Do participants who contribute experience, labour, practice, or compliance gain greater capacity to understand and reshape the normative order that results? These questions identify institutional features through which asymmetric generative capacity can be made more compatible with continued formation.

The resulting orientation is neither a programme of permanent deliberation nor a demand for the disappearance of authority. Institutions require selective attention, inherited competence, temporal continuity, and the ability to act. The concern is whether these functions are organized in ways that turn every successful stabilization into progressively greater dependence on the same formative sources. Continued normative generation is preserved when settlement and inheritance remain connected to practicable possibilities of learning, criticism, re-entry, and revision. Under those conditions, asymmetry can perform coordinating and capacity-building roles without necessarily becoming a closed architecture of interpretation.

These institutional conditions remain intentionally broad. Their operational meaning depends on domain-specific law, practice, technology, organizational structure, and empirical history, and some may conflict when applied in particular settings. The breadth that made the framework useful across three cases therefore becomes a limitation at the point of institutional application. That limitation requires an explicit account of scope, evidence, and unresolved research problems before the argument can be concluded.

## 15 Scope Conditions, Limitations, and Research Directions

A preliminary framework becomes useful only if the limits of its vocabulary remain visible. The concepts developed above span philosophy, law, aesthetics, and institutional analysis, yet their breadth does not establish that they operate identically across those domains. This section therefore marks the main scope conditions and unresolved problems, and identifies research paths through which the framework could be tested, refined, divided, or abandoned. The aim is to distinguish the claims presently supported by the argument from stronger claims that would require additional conceptual, doctrinal, historical, or empirical work.

The first limitation concerns the breadth of *normative formation*. The paper has used this expression for processes through which distinctions, interpretive conventions, evaluative categories, expectations, and practical standards acquire sufficient stability to organize recognition or action. This analytical scope is wider than formal rule-making and narrower than social causation in general. Many influences on behaviour do not become part of a normative formation. Material constraints, habits, emotional responses, technological affordances, and inherited classifications may affect conduct without being articulated or treated as reasons, standards, or expectations. The boundary can also be difficult to locate because some normative structures remain partly implicit. The framework therefore requires domain-specific work to determine when a recurring influence should be described as a formative source of a normative order as distinct from one of its surrounding causal conditions.

The normative-grammar analogy remains subject to the same restriction. It is intended to draw attention to relatively stabilized patterns that affect what can be intelligibly asserted, evaluated, or enacted within a practice. It does not imply that normative orders possess a syntax comparable in precision or closure to a natural or formal language. Normative formations can be internally inconsistent, only partially shared, and distributed across practices that do not compose a single coherent system. Their boundaries can remain contested by participants who nevertheless interact within them. The analogy is therefore most useful where it helps identify structured regularities in interpretation and evaluation; it becomes misleading when it suggests a determinate grammar behind every disagreement.

A second limitation concerns the concept of *generative capacity*. The paper has treated capacity as relational and domain-specific: a source can be well positioned to contribute to one form of normative formation while having little influence elsewhere. This formulation avoids treating capacity as a fixed possession, while also complicating empirical inquiry. No single direct measure captures it: counts of resources, formal rights, institutional offices, or observed outcomes each remain partial proxies whose relevance varies by domain. A participant may possess formal access without legibility, recognized expertise without institutional reach, wide visibility without durable influence, or substantial resources without acceptance as a relevant normative source. Future empirical work therefore needs to identify the mediating relations through which a capacity becomes effective in a particular domain.

This problem is especially important for the distinction between generative capacity and realized normative influence developed in Section 5. Observed influence is itself difficult to attribute. Normative change can be multiply caused, delayed, dispersed through intermediaries, or expressed through the adoption of categories whose origin is no longer visible. Participants can also adapt strategically to what they anticipate others will accept, making influence partly counterfactual. A source may matter because an alternative was never proposed in its presence, because its vocabulary structured the available options, or because actors expected that deviation would receive no recognition. These possibilities make simple before-and-after inference unreliable. Historical process tracing, archival reconstruction, comparison across institutional settings, and carefully specified network or discourse analyses may each illuminate parts of the problem, although none should be assumed to capture the whole of formative influence.

The proposed mechanisms of endogenous weighting and generative crowding-out remain correspondingly provisional. Sections 6 and 7 argued that prior influence can alter the conditions under which later sources receive access, legibility, recognition, or persistence. The argument identifies a plausible relational mechanism; it does not establish its prevalence or magnitude across domains. Reweighting can also have heterogeneous consequences. A stabilized vocabulary can make communication more efficient, a professional standard can preserve difficult competence, and an inherited canon can carry achievements that would otherwise be lost. Similar mechanisms can become restrictive when they reduce the continued intelligibility or reproducibility of relevant alternatives. Empirical research is therefore needed on the conditions under which stabilization supports cumulative formation, under which it produces dependence, and under which it develops into the narrower process described here as generative crowding-out.

A third limitation concerns the relation between asymmetry and power. The paper has intentionally refrained from defining every differential capacity as power. Some asymmetries are episodic, complementary, or tied to responsibilities that require differentiated competence. Others become consequential because they allow one source to shape the conditions under which other sources can be recognized or reproduced. The transition from differential capacity to relations appropriately described as power remains partly dependent on the concept of power adopted for a given inquiry. The framework contributes a narrower question: whether a relation enables a source to reshape the possible paths of later normative formation. More complete engagement with competing theories of power, authority, dependence, domination, and legitimacy would be required before that question could support a general theory of social power.

The trajectory-sensitive argument also has clear scope conditions. Historical provenance is not relevant to every claim in the same way. In some domains, the current validity of a proposition can be assessed with little reference to the path by which it was discovered. In other domains, the history of formation helps determine what a concept means, how a legal rule is identified or interpreted, or what capacities remain available for later revision. Section 12 therefore distinguished historical background and causal history from the stronger case in which trajectory bears on present intelligibility, identification, or evaluation. This distinction is necessary to avoid a genetic fallacy in which the origin of a position is mistaken for a sufficient reason to affirm or reject it. Provenance-sensitive analysis asks what information formation history contributes; it does not make history an automatic source of validity.

The three case studies should be read within this limited role. They were selected because they expose different difficulties in normative formation, as analytically selected cases, with no frequency claims inferred from inferred. Philosophical claim formation illuminates argumentative provenance and the way conceptual positions can acquire meaning through a history of objections and revisions; intellectual genealogy alone does not determine truth. International law separates legal sources, formation, identification, interpretation, and application while showing how legally relevant historical materials remain constrained by doctrine and institutional practice. That structure is specific to law and supplies no template for normative orders in general.

Aesthetics introduces a different limit. It brings pre-explicit perception and evaluative articulation into view, while the proposed co-formation of perceptual responsiveness and aesthetic norms remains an analytical hypothesis as a provisional account of aesthetic experience. The cases therefore extend the framework in different directions while simultaneously marking the limits of generalization.

These cases also leave important comparisons unexplored. Philosophy, law, and aesthetics all contain institutions, canons, expert roles, educational processes, and histories of exclusion, yet they differ sharply in the kinds of validity claims they make and the procedures through which disagreement is handled. A future comparative programme could examine whether the same apparent mechanism of formative asymmetry performs different functions when truth, legality, aesthetic judgment, professional competence, or coordinated action is at stake. Such comparison would be particularly useful for identifying *negative cases*: settings in which substantial asymmetry does not produce crowding-out, or in which broad participation does not preserve effective openness. Negative cases would help prevent the framework from treating every later concentration as confirmation of its own concepts.

A fourth limitation concerns normative evaluation. Section 13 proposed that provenance, capacity effects, revisability, self-reinforcement, contestability, and generative return can provide normatively relevant information. These dimensions can conflict, and the paper has offered no principle that aggregates them into a single ordering. Nor has it established that continued normative generation should override other goods. Stability, legal certainty, confidentiality, safety, expertise, artistic discipline, coordination, and protection against manipulation can each justify restrictions on participation under some conditions. A trajectory-sensitive evaluation should therefore remain connected to the purposes and obligations of the practice being evaluated. Continued generation is one relevant concern among others, although it becomes especially important when present settlements determine who will remain capable of questioning or revising them in the future.

The institutional discussion in Section 14 should be interpreted in the same way. Heterogeneous formative entry, preserved competence, institutional memory, contestability, re-entry, bounded authority, and alternative formative sites are diagnostic considerations rather than a universal constitutional design. Their practical meaning depends upon scale, technology, legal structure, organizational purpose, temporal urgency, and the costs of error. In some settings, overlapping review and alternative centres may preserve important redundancy. In others, fragmented authority may make accountability obscure or prevent timely action. The framework therefore supports questions about how closure and revisability are organized; it does not determine the institutional answer independently of the domain.

These limitations point toward several research directions. One concerns *operationalization*. The concepts developed here could be translated into observable indicators only after specifying the relevant normative domain and its formative interfaces. Possible indicators might concern routes of entry, patterns of citation or recognition, control over classificatory vocabularies, access to archives or infrastructures, reproduction of expertise, revision procedures, and the survival of alternative interpretive communities. The purpose of such indicators would be to reconstruct relations among sources over time, not to reduce generative capacity to a universal numerical index.

A second direction concerns longitudinal and comparative research. The framework is fundamentally temporal, yet the paper has relied primarily on conceptual reconstruction and illustrative cases. Historical sequences could be studied through archival materials, successive editions or doctrinal changes, records of institutional decisions, changes in curricula and canons, or the formation and dissolution of professional communities. Comparative designs could examine similar normative questions under different institutional arrangements, allowing researchers to distinguish mechanisms that depend upon a specific history from those that recur across settings. Such work would also make it possible to study reversals: cases in which previously crowded-out sources regain legibility or formative capacity.

A third direction concerns formal and computational representation. The ideas of endogenous weighting, path dependence, and capacity reproduction could in principle be represented through dynamic networks, agent-based models, or other formal systems. Such representations would be useful only when the mapping between formal objects and the normative phenomena is explicit. A model that assigns numerical weights to sources could illustrate possible feedback patterns while leaving unanswered what the weights mean empirically or why a particular transition should be evaluated positively or negatively. Formal work should therefore clarify mechanisms and counterfactuals while remaining complementary to historical interpretation, doctrinal analysis, and normative argument.

A fourth direction concerns the relation between explicit and pre-explicit formation. The aesthetic case suggests that articulated norms may develop in interaction with perceptual, affective, and embodied differentiations that are not yet fully available as propositions. Similar questions may arise in professional judgment, education, craft, scientific observation, and everyday social classification. Interdisciplinary work combining phenomenology, psychology, sociology, history, and domain-specific practice could examine how such differentiations become stabilized as reasons or standards and how later norms reshape what participants are able to perceive. This line of inquiry would also test the limits of the normative-grammar analogy by studying forms of formation that are only partially linguistic.

A fifth direction concerns generative return and capacity-building asymmetry. Many asymmetries are justified, at least provisionally, because one participant possesses expertise, bears responsibility, or performs a coordinating role. The framework suggests asking whether the exercise of such capacity leaves others more able to understand, contest, inherit, or eventually replace the relation. Educational settings offer an especially clear form of this question, but similar structures can appear in professional regulation, legal practice, scientific communities, organizations, and cultural institutions. Research on these trajectories could help distinguish asymmetries that reproduce permanent dependence from those that convert temporary differentiation into wider future capacity.

Finally, the framework itself requires conceptual revision through use. The terms introduced in this paper—generative capacity, realized normative influence, endogenous weighting, generative crowding-out, normative closure, argumentative provenance, and generative return—should be retained only where they continue to discriminate phenomena that would otherwise be conflated. Some may prove too broad, overlap with better-established concepts, or require subdivision after closer empirical and disciplinary work. A preliminary framework should therefore remain vulnerable to the cases it is intended to illuminate. The aim is to provide a revisable set of distinctions through which the dynamics of normative formation can be examined with greater temporal and relational precision.

These limitations return the inquiry to its central question in a more restricted form. Heterogeneous sources may acquire different formative capacities, and past influence may reshape later participation. The significance of those relations depends on their domain, trajectory, and consequences for continued formation. The conclusion gathers the argument at this deliberately provisional level.

## 16 Conclusion

This paper has examined a limited but recurrent difficulty in normative formation. Normative orders often become visible only after concepts, practices, interpretive conventions, and evaluative distinctions have acquired enough stability to be treated as available objects of judgment. A present articulation can therefore conceal the heterogeneous relations through which it became intelligible and effective. The central proposal of this paper is that such formation deserves particular attention when the sources participating in it possess unequal generative capacities and when earlier differences in influence reshape the conditions of later participation.

The vocabulary developed here separates several relations that are easily collapsed. *Generative capacity* concerns a source's situated ability to participate in producing, stabilizing, transmitting, interpreting, or revising a normative formation. *Realized normative influence* concerns the effects that capacity actually acquires within a relational environment. Prior influence can then become consequential at a second level by altering access, intelligibility, recognition, institutional support, or the reproduction of competence. *Endogenous weighting*, *generative crowding-out*, and *normative closure* name progressively more restrictive possibilities within this second-order problem. These concepts leave the normative status of asymmetry, authority, and stabilization open to domain-specific evaluation. Their analytical value lies in asking how a difference is produced, what it enables, what it suppresses, and whether alternative sources retain effective routes of participation and revision.

The analysis of decentralized formation reinforces this relational view. Distributed participation can widen formative entry while simultaneously producing expertise, trust, visibility, coordination roles, network centrality, and infrastructural dependence. Decentralization therefore changes the mechanisms through which asymmetry emerges while leaving the normative question open. Some asymmetries distribute competence and enlarge future participation. Others accumulate into durable dependence or interpretive closure. The difference becomes visible only when the analysis follows the formation through time.

The three case studies sharpened this temporal claim in different ways. Philosophical claim formation showed why a final thesis can be intelligible only through the problems, inherited vocabularies, objections, and revisions that made the position available. International law required a more disciplined separation among legal sources, norm formation, identification, interpretation, and application, while showing that some historical materials possess doctrinal relevance rather than merely contextual interest. Aesthetic norm formation introduced a further difficulty: explicit judgment can develop in recursive relation with perceptual, affective, and embodied differentiations that are only partly articulated, while education, criticism, canon formation, and institutional recognition reshape later perception. The cases therefore do not instantiate one mechanism. Together they show several ways in which formation history can contribute to present intelligibility while truth, validity, and aesthetic authority remain separate questions.

This distinction between provenance and validity motivates the paper's account of normative trajectories. Historical accumulation can preserve vocabularies, archives, competencies, institutions, expectations, and infrastructures that make later judgment possible. It can also narrow available alternatives or make earlier concentrations of influence increasingly difficult to reopen. A trajectory-sensitive evaluation therefore adds information that a present snapshot may omit: how an asymmetry arose, whether its effects are reversible, how strongly it reproduces itself, whether affected participants can contest it, and whether its exercise returns or depletes future generative capacity. These dimensions supplement domain-specific standards of truth, legality, justice, expertise, or aesthetic judgment.

The institutional implication is correspondingly modest. Coordinated practices frequently require decisions, specialization, and temporary settlement. The relevant distinction is between settlement sufficient for action and closure that progressively removes the capacities required for later reconsideration. Heterogeneous routes of entry, preserved competence, institutional memory, effective contestability, opportunities for re-entry, bounded concentrations of authority, and alternative formative sites can help maintain this distinction, although their appropriate form remains dependent on domain, scale, urgency, and the costs of error.

The framework remains preliminary. Generative capacity is not a universal measurable variable; the three case studies are analytical rather than representative; and trajectory sensitivity does not yield a single ordering of normative arrangements. The framework is useful only where its distinctions clarify relations that more established vocabularies leave conflated. Future historical, doctrinal, empirical, philosophical, and formal work may therefore refine, divide, or replace the concepts proposed here.

The paper's final question can thus be stated narrowly. When a normative formation is produced through heterogeneous and asymmetrically situated sources, how does the exercise of formative capacity alter the ability of relevant sources to participate in what comes next? Asking this question leaves judgments of truth, justice, lawfulness, beauty, and legitimacy to their appropriate standards while making visible a temporal and relational dimension of normative life: present settlements shape what is currently recognized and the capacities through which future recognition, criticism, inheritance, and revision remain possible.

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